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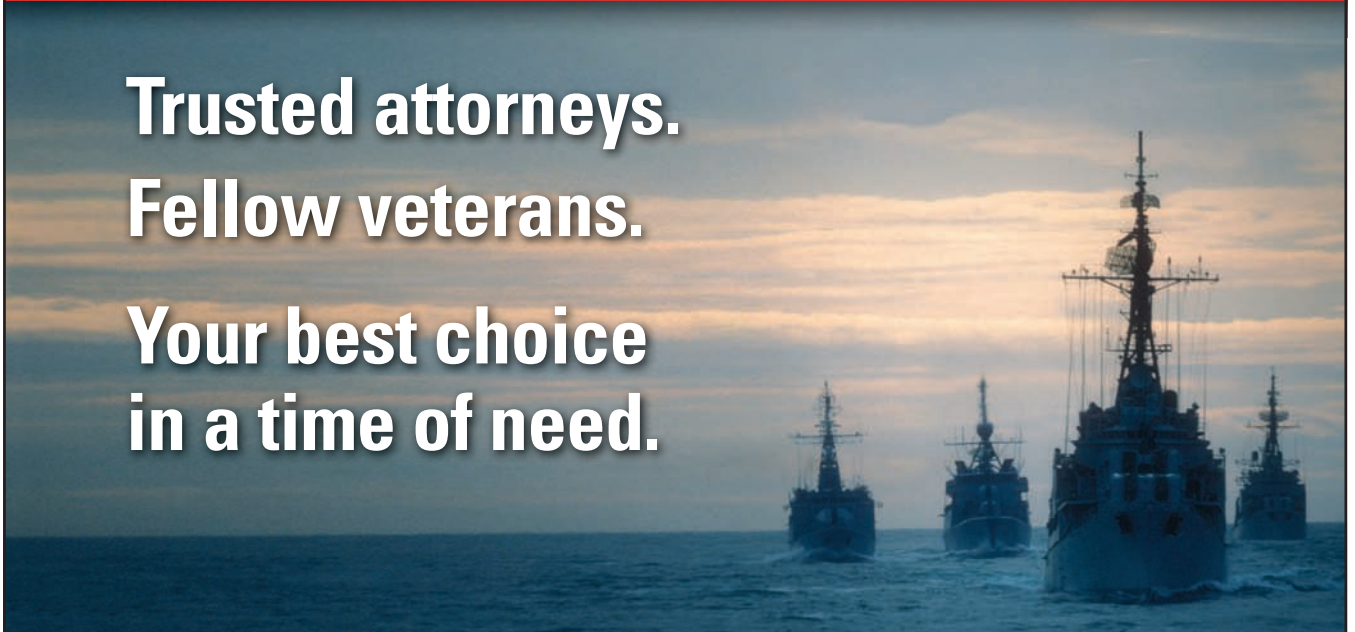
Y-Siu Hlong, executive director, Montagnard Dega Association



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| DETROIT | (248) 530-0300 |
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Copyright 2011 by The American Legion

The American Legion (ISSN 0886-1234) is published monthly by The American Legion, 5745 Lee Road, Indianapolis, IN 46216. Periodicals postage paid at Indianapolis, IN 46204 and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The American Legion, Data Services, P.O. Box 1954, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

Canada Post International Publications Mail (*Canadian Distribution*)

Sales Agreement No. PM40063731. Return Undeliverable

Canadian Addresses to: Station A, P.O. Box, Windsor ON N9A 6J5. Re-entered second-class mail matter at Manila Central Post Office dated Dec. 22, 1991.



Printed in USA
Member Audit Bureau of Circulations

The Magazine for a Strong America

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Indianapolis, IN 46206
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TELEPHONE (317) 630-1298
WEB SITE www.legion.org
SUBSCRIPTIONS Free with membership
Non-members: \$15
Foreign: \$21
Post-sponsored and widows: \$6
Single copies: \$3.50

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'The Big Benning Theory'

Regarding the article by Douglas Wissing (January), it will be interesting to see, a year from now, how well the combining of the infantry and armor schools has succeeded. In 1944, there was a great need for infantry officers. TIS set up an eight-week special basic course to train officers from almost any branch of the service to be line officers. I was just out of OCS at Fort Knox, and shipped to Fort Benning along with almost everyone in the TAS officers pool.

We found TIS to be beautifully organized and scripted to the last syllable, with occasional imperfections that we had no qualms in pointing out (none of us wanted to be there, particularly when they started referring to us as "retreads"). All in all, I think we had a positive effect on TIS training. Most of us went out to training units for three months of troop duty. We may have been looked down on, but we were gradually accepted with our not-by-the-book ideas.

— Richard A. Hale, Bethel, Maine

The realignment, as stated many times, is a tremendous boon for the Fort Benning area. But you made no mention of the loss to Fort Knox and its economy, and what's being done to offset the impact. As a Fort Knox alumnus, I carry the sweat and dust of my training in my veins, and in my heart, and am sorry for the great people of Fort Knox and the surrounding community.

— Wayne J. Kelly, Albany, N.Y.

BRAC's reasoning as to the savings brought about by this move eludes me. The infrastructure at Fort Knox is already in place to support the armor school. The article states that Fort Benning will have undergone more than \$3.5 billion worth of construction to accommodate the move. What happens to the billions worth of infrastructure at Fort Knox? Where are the savings?

— Donald C. Keaton, Haskell, Okla.

'Veterans Welcome'

This was a wonderful article about the USAA and American Legion partnership (January).



I have been a member of USAA for 55 years. I get a dividend check every fall and a member bonus every February.

When an insurance agent calls, I challenge him: "I'll bet you \$100 (yours, too – on the table!) that you cannot beat USAA's rates and service."

— Robert L. Legel, Livonia, Mich.

'A Jacket's Journey'

Ken Olsen's article (January) brought back memories of the new Army field jacket issued to me to replace my old one before I left my station in Metz, France, to return to the United States for discharge. In New York City, where many of us were processing out, the only pieces of Army clothing requested from us were our field jackets. I sadly gave up my new one, which I never got to wear. Years ago, I bought a used one, but I never found the right size due to my short stature and large chest size.

— Gale J. Anderson, Bloomington, Minn.

My experiences were very similar to David Herbert's, but my ending was different.

I, too, took very good care of my field jacket, only wearing it during basic and artillery AIT. In Vietnam, I stored it and used an older jacket that another soldier gave me. A few weeks before leaving, I got the jacket out and had the appropriate insignia and stripes sewn on. I had always admired guys like my uncle, who occasionally wore their jackets after they got out of the service.

I carried it, along with a small ditty bag, through Sea-Tac Airport after being discharged in June 1970. I set the jacket and bag on a chair outside the men's restroom. When I came out 45 seconds later, the jacket was gone. I can imagine the uproar today if someone was seen stealing from a soldier, but back then, nobody cared. That was my welcome home.

— Ralph H. Forbes, Omaha, Neb.

'No Pet Left Behind'

I read the article by Dennis McCafferty (January), which I suppose most people would feel was a heartwarming story. I, however, found it irritating and somewhat disturbing that you would portray these soldiers and airmen as heroes. Rules and regulations, whether during training or combat, deserve more respect. I will not even begin to list all the reasons why it is against regulations to have contact with local animals while deployed – not the least of which are disease, and distractions that lead to combat ineffectiveness and losses.

Servicemembers who ignore regulations, however small they may seem, greatly diminish the

unit's capability. These are the same servicemembers who also think it's OK to record combat operations and post them on the Web. These videos educate the enemy, and have no doubt cost Americans and allies their lives.

I know young soldiers don't always understand the reasons why we do things a certain way in the military, but the very foundation of military discipline is to obey first and ask questions later. I am now retired from service, but I spent more than two years conducting combat operations in Iraq. I know firsthand how a lack of discipline can unravel a unit, and it all starts with a cute little puppy.

— Victor Dabney, Camden, S.C.

'The Federal Hiring Gauntlet'

I read the article by Ken Olsen (December), and it brought back some bad memories. I got out of the Army in 1980 and went back to Topeka, Kan. I went on three interviews for state jobs, and was told they had to hire people on welfare over me. Then I applied for a part-time food-service job at the Topeka VA. I got it because of my five-point veterans preference, and heard that was the only reason. I felt unwelcome at that job, and it only got worse when I joined the National Guard to make extra money and thus had to be off one weekend a month.

Finally, I moved to the Fort Hood area, where vets are treated a little better, and got a job with the Texas prisons that I've been at for 30 years. The federal-jobs issue is not recent.

— William Anderson, Copperas Cove, Texas

As an officer who has been involved in hiring personnel, I have learned a great deal about certain programs related to civilian federal employment that I never knew existed.

Like most military personnel, I thought veterans preference was a big plus. In years past, it may have been. But today, a myriad of additional programs is displacing it. For example, I have learned that no federal position will be filled until the PPP (Priority Placement Program) is cleared. Required registrants include employees eligible for severance pay who are in receipt of an RIF separation notice, or who are scheduled to be separated for declining an assignment outside the community area. Due to BRAC, there are a large number of PPP registrants in certain areas. They get priority over standard veterans preference. I believe this program is having a negative impact on veterans' chances to get federal positions.

— Wesley Girvin, Woodbridge, Va.

What would help veterans get employment is a cross-reference guide for employers wanting to understand their training and skill level. For instance, if a CM-2 applies for a job as a mechanic, the employer could go to the guide and see the equivalent, and how it would benefit his business.

— Art Bargabos, Wasilla, Alaska

Editor's note: In "New Posts" (Rapid Fire, February), American Legion Post 80 in Trout Lake is in Michigan, not Minnesota.

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Whether you know it or not, when you joined the Legion, you made a similar commitment. By paying your dues, you were making possible the continuation of the mission and the many programs of The American Legion. By renewing your membership, you extended that commitment for at least another year.

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Some posts reward active and longtime members and past post commanders with PUFL memberships. It's a way of saying, "Thanks for what you've done for the Legion all these years. We're going to make it easier for you to keep doing it." Others encourage their members to become PUFLs. And at the end of the day, any Paid-Up-For-Life member is one less member a post needs to renew each year. Get 50 PUFL members in a post of 100, and you're automatically at 50 percent at the beginning of the membership year, without making a single call or knocking on any doors.

Getting a PUFL membership is a financial commitment. I know that. And I know that in these unsteady financial times, that's asking a lot. But look at it in terms larger than dollars and cents. You're not just buying a lifetime membership. You're making a lifetime commitment to the principles and programs upon which this organization was founded. You're committing funds to programs that make a difference in communities across America, for veterans, servicemembers, their families and the youth of our country.

The dues from your PUFL membership support the hundreds of thousands of young people who participate in American Legion Baseball, Oratoricals, Boys State and Boys Nation each year. They provide the means for Legion staff to go before Congress and lobby for your benefits, and the benefits of our men and women in uniform. They make it possible for Legion representatives to make site visits at VA medical facilities across the country, ensuring that our veterans are getting the best care possible.

A PUFL membership is an investment in The American Legion, but what the Legion does every day makes it an investment that pays priceless dividends. Those who have stood in harm's way, from France to Fallujah – along with their families, children and communities everywhere – directly benefit from the strength of our membership. To become a PUFL member secures that strength for a lifetime.




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Defund National Public Radio



SUPPORT

**Rep. Doug Lamborn,
R-Colo.**

■ Lamborn is a member of the House Armed Services Committee.

National Public Radio's firing of longtime news analyst Juan Williams was a wake-up call for many Americans regarding political correctness and liberal bias at NPR. However, it's not so much the liberal bias that offends me, but the fact that our tax dollars are funding it.

It's time for Congress to focus our nation's spending on its most pressing needs. My bill would prohibit federal dollars from going to NPR through any of the various federal grants it now accesses.

NPR receives taxpayer funding in two different ways. First, it receives direct government grants from various federal agencies. Over the past two years, this direct funding has totaled approximately \$9 million. Second, it receives funds indirectly through programming fees and dues paid by local public-radio stations to NPR. Last year, that amounted to about \$65 million. Some of these funds were originally federal tax dollars provided to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting for the local public-radio stations.

NPR claims that less than 2 percent of its total annual budget comes from the federal government. But when you consider the indirect revenue it receives in licensing fees from the federally funded local stations, that number jumps to an estimated 20 percent.

During the lame-duck session, House Democrats voted down my bill to end taxpayer funding of NPR. Now that Republicans have assumed the majority, I expect that NPR funding will be one of many expenditures facing close scrutiny. At a time when the federal government borrows 40 cents of every dollar it spends, we simply cannot afford to spend money on nonessential government services.



OPPOSE

**Rep. Earl Blumenauer,
D-Ore.**

■ Blumenauer is a member of the House Budget Committee.

Every month, more than 100 million Americans access public radio and television stations and their free content. These stations operate in cities and towns across the country, and in many rural areas they are the only source of free and high-quality news coverage. They employ more than

17,000 of our friends and neighbors, providing family-wage jobs in every state.

Why the reminder of the role that public radio plays in our country? Because screaming pundits on cable news, and some of their friends in Washington, are

attacking public radio because NPR fired news analyst Juan Williams. Some are even calling for an end to funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and hoping that the American people don't speak up about the value of these services in their lives. Federal investment in public media provides up to 20 percent of the budget for local stations across the country, and its loss would be devastating.

Whether or not you agree with the firing of Williams – and I certainly believe NPR behaved clumsily – it does not follow that a public-media system that has served our country for more than 40 years should be defunded. It is beloved across the country because it is so uniquely American. Stations are locally owned and operated, and they are funded in large part by their own communities, ensuring that they remain relevant and widely supported.

In today's polarized media environment, the wealth of free news, information, and educational and cultural programming offered by public radio cannot be replaced. The American public deserves access to the news and jobs that public media have to offer.

THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

When National Public Radio fired Juan Williams for making controversial comments on Fox News, critics called for Congress to end NPR's federal funding. Supporters say public radio and television provide an important service.

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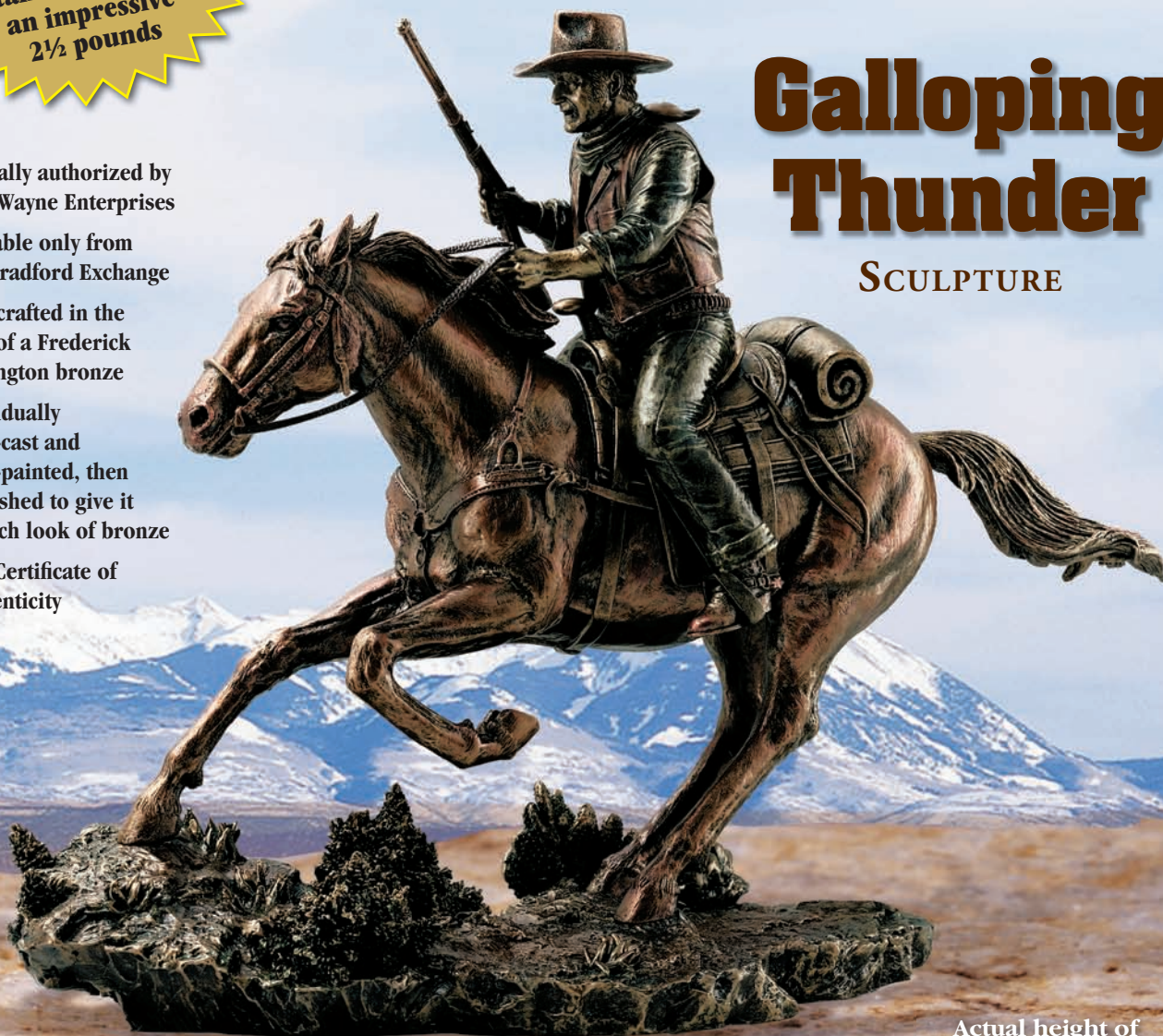
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Myths of the multivitamin

BY JUDITH HURLEY

More than half of all adults take some type of dietary supplement – collectively shelling out \$20 billion a year for the privilege – and multivitamins are the most popular choice. People take supplements for various reasons, but prevention of chronic disease is often high on the list. There's little evidence, however, that a one-a-day-type supplement confers significant health benefits, and recent headlines on the topic have left many wondering if it's time to toss their multivitamins.

The Women's Health Initiative, which involved more than 160,000 postmenopausal women over eight years, reported in 2009 that multivitamin use had no influence on the risk for cardiovascular disease and common cancers (including those of the breast, colon, endometrium, stomach, kidneys and lung). Similarly, a 10-year study of 78,000 middle-aged and older adults in Washington state found that multivitamins had no effect on cancer deaths or mortality from any cause, although they were associated with a slightly lower risk of dying from heart disease. Other studies have found that multivitamins don't influence breast cancer or heart-disease risk, but that long-term use (10 to 15 years or more) may lower risk for colorectal cancer.

If multivitamins do have benefits, the pluses appear to be modest at best. Some research even suggests that multivitamins have a downside. In a National Cancer Institute

study that tracked 300,000 men for five years, taking multivitamins was linked to a higher risk for prostate cancer (the association was greatest in men who also took supplements of certain single

nutrients). Adding to the concern, an analysis of 30 multivitamin brands by Consumer Labs, an independent testing laboratory, found that nearly one-third of the products contained significantly more or less of an ingredient than the label indicated, or that the supplement was

contaminated with lead. Since several nutrients can be harmful in large amounts – including selenium, vitamin A, beta carotene and folic acid – this lack of quality control is a concern.

Experts are divided on whether getting rid of your multivitamins is a good idea, but there is wide agreement that whole foods – with their complex mix of dozens of nutrients, antioxidants and fiber – remain the best way to get your vitamins and minerals. For those who have difficulty consuming a balanced diet, multivitamins may help fill in the blanks, but don't count on them for disease prevention.

Nutrition in a pill

Research shows that multivitamins may not provide much in the way of health benefits for people who consume a reasonably healthy diet. If you do take a multivitamin, follow these tips:

- Don't rely on supplements to meet your nutritional needs. Focus on consuming a balanced diet of healthful whole foods.
- Choose a multivitamin product that provides about 100 percent of the daily value (DV) for most nutrients.
- If you're 65 or older, choose a multivitamin formulated especially for seniors, which is balanced to meet an older person's unique nutritional needs.
- Be aware that ready-to-eat cereals, snack bars and other foods are often fortified with a day's worth of certain vitamins and minerals. More isn't necessarily better, so if you eat these foods regularly, you may want to skip the multivitamin.

Judith Hurley is a freelance writer specializing in medicine and health.

Living Well is designed to provide general information. It is not intended to be, nor is it, medical advice. Readers should consult their physicians when they have health problems.

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Homegrown health

Dietitians are calling on Americans to adopt a more “plant-based diet, rich in fruits and vegetables,” according to a study published in *U.S. News & World Report*.

Elizabeth Pivonka, president of the Produce for Better Health Foundation, a Delaware-based nonprofit organization committed to improving public health by encouraging people to eat more fruits and vegetables, recommends that half our plates be fruits and veggies. Why? They are packed with stuff that keeps us healthy: fiber, vitamins and minerals that fight and even prevent disease.

The study also encourages consumers to consider the health advantages of growing their own produce, noting that grocery-store produce is often more expensive and less nutritive. Due to produce’s long journey to the supermarket and the consumer, its price goes up and its health value goes down, as it degrades between the time it is picked and purchased.

BLAST BADGE: Innovative material could signal potential TBI

BY RACHEL KAUFMAN

A new “blast badge” may someday help diagnose brain injuries in soldiers.

Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have developed a material that changes color when hit by an explosion’s shockwave. Produced by etching plastic into tiny patterns with lasers, the new badge won’t change color in heat or cold, and even hitting it with a hammer won’t cause the badge to change. But blast exposure changes the badge irreversibly.

Brain trauma can have no external symptoms, MRI scans take time, and medics can make mistakes, meaning that brain injuries – which are linked to post-traumatic stress – could go undiagnosed. Though recent Department of Defense guidelines require anyone involved in a blast to be screened by a medic and rest for 24 hours, soldiers who report feeling fine can be sent back into service too soon, when they really need rest and rehab.

The “blast badge” is sewn into a soldier’s clothing or placed on the helmet. The badge will provide a definitive

marker of the strength of an explosion and whether or not the individual was affected.

U.S. forces overseas are at risk of being in or near an explosion at almost any time. Nearly 200,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan have suffered at least one concussion since the beginning of the wars, according to the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, a federally funded medical and research system. Most of those injuries are mild, but 20 percent have lasting effects on a soldier’s brain, including headaches, forgetfulness and depression.

The technology is still in the lab, but Dr. Douglas H. Smith, neurosurgery professor at the University of Pennsylvania and

lead author of the study that developed the blast material, hopes the badges can replace or augment DoD’s current electronics-based approach.

“If you don’t need power, that’s a big start,” Smith says. “And if a medic can understand it without reading a complicated chart, that’s one of the most important things.”

How it works



Blast exposure disrupts the nanostructure of the blast-injury dosimeter, resulting in clear changes in color. The color changes may be calibrated to denote the severity of blast exposure in relation to thresholds for blast-related traumatic brain injury.

Credit: Dr. Douglas H. Smith, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine

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embarrassed to admit that I've grown a spare tire (I'm sure it's hurting my love life).

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longer he talked, the more sense it made. He was even wearing a pair himself!

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Osteoporosis: Beyond BMD

BY MARK FUERST

If you have thin bones, simply relying on bone mineral density (BMD) tests to assess your risk of osteoporosis may not provide you with your real risk of sustaining a fracture. A bone-density scan only predicts 44 percent of women and 21 percent of men 65 and older who will get a fracture, according to a Dutch study. More than half of all fractures occur in people who don't have osteoporosis, but pre-osteoporosis, called osteopenia.

An estimated 10 million Americans have osteoporosis, and every year 2 million people with the disease have an osteoporotic fracture, usually of the hip, spine or wrist. Another 34 million people (80 percent of them women) have osteopenia, which means that their bones are thinner than normal, but not thin enough to be labeled as osteoporosis.

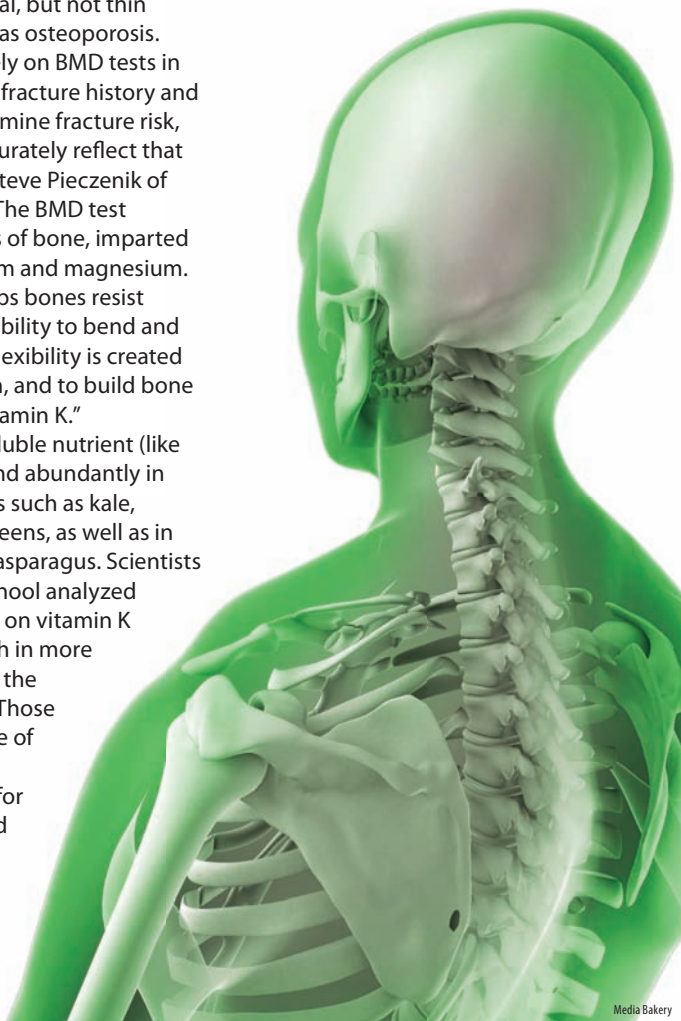
Doctors primarily rely on BMD tests in conjunction with age, fracture history and family history to determine fracture risk, but BMD does not accurately reflect that fracture risk, says Dr. Steve Pieczenik of NBI Pharmaceuticals. The BMD test indicates the hardness of bone, imparted by the minerals calcium and magnesium. "Flexibility is what helps bones resist fracture – the bone's ability to bend and not break," he says. "Flexibility is created by the bone's collagen, and to build bone collagen, you need vitamin K."

Vitamin K is a fat-soluble nutrient (like vitamins A and D) found abundantly in leafy green vegetables such as kale, spinach and collard greens, as well as in lettuce, cabbage and asparagus. Scientists at Harvard Medical School analyzed 10 years of health data on vitamin K intake and bone health in more than 70,000 women in the Nurses' Health Study. Those with the highest intake of vitamin K had a 30-percent-lower risk for hip fracture, compared with women who had the lowest intake. Doctors from England analyzed data from 13 studies on

osteoporosis and found that a specific form of vitamin K called MK-4, in the amount of 45 mg per day, decreased hip fractures by 73 percent, spinal fractures by 60 percent, and nonspinal fractures by 81 percent. This is significantly better than spinal-fracture reductions with commonly prescribed osteoporosis drugs, Pieczenik says.

If you are at risk for or have osteoporosis, he suggests you start eating more leafy green vegetables, and consider taking dietary supplements containing calcium, vitamin D and 45 mg of MK-4.

Mark Fuerst is a Brooklyn-based health and medical writer.



HDL-Alzheimer's link explored

A new study published in the *Archives of Neurology* journal suggests that having high HDL – also known as “good cholesterol” – may reduce a person's risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

According to WebMD, researchers at Columbia University in New York followed 1,130 seniors who had no history of memory trouble or dementia. Every 18 months for an average of four years, participants participated in a battery of blood, brain and memory tests. By the end of the study, doctors had diagnosed 101 cases of suspected Alzheimer's disease. Those participants with the highest HDL counts had a 60-percent-reduced risk of developing Alzheimer's, as compared to those with low HDL levels.

HDL levels of 60 mg/dL or higher are considered good. WebMD notes that men with HDL levels under 40 mg/dL, and women with HDL levels under 50 mg/dL, should work to improve their numbers.

The nexus between HDL and Alzheimer's is not fully understood, though it could be related to what HDL does in the body.

“HDL is one of the major carriers of protein in the brain,” says Dr. Lenore Launer, chief of the neuroepidemiology section at the National Institute on Aging's Intramural Research Program.

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GI Bill reform built on tough trade-offs

BY TOM PHILPOTT

Tasha Taylor of Charleston, S.C., and Ken Kaspirzyk of Buffalo, N.Y., have very different opinions of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010, which President Obama signed into law Jan. 4.

Taylor, an Air Force veteran, says the revised GI Bill will pay online students half of the monthly living stipend now payable only to classroom students. The new provision will allow her to get her psychology degree while working to take care of her three children.

But Kaspirzyk, an Army reservist, says that same reform package sets a new cap of \$17,500 on benefits for students like him who attend private colleges. That will force him to drop out of D'Youville College in Buffalo when his uncovered costs jump by more than \$15,000 a year.

Even if D'Youville elects to participate in the new GI Bill's "yellow-ribbon" program, under which schools excuse half of any charges in excess of GI Bill benefits and VA pays the other half, Kaspirzyk won't qualify. The enhancement is available only to veterans with 100-percent Post-9/11 GI Bill entitlement, earned through three years on active duty.

"I am sure the intention was not to hurt veterans currently in school, but that is exactly what they have done," he says. "I based my school selection on what I knew I was promised with the GI Bill."

The Legion and other veterans service organizations hailed the enactment of the reform bill but have acknowledged that lawmakers made some painful compromises before its final passage in the lame-duck session of the 111th Congress.

For example, veterans using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits will see their monthly living stipends stopped between the fall and winter semesters. Also, starting next year, only full-time students will draw living stipends at the 100-percent rate, ending a windfall Congress never intended.

Because of these and other cost-saving changes, the Congressional Budget Office projects that

GI Bill costs will fall by \$734 million through 2020. But here are some highlights of what was gained in the compromise bill:

- **Education options.** Veterans will now be able to use their benefits for on-the-job training, apprenticeships, vocational-technical schools and other non-degree-granting institutions.

- **More Guard members.** Correcting an oversight of the 2008 law, National Guard members will soon qualify for the new GI Bill

if activated for a sufficient length of time since 9/11, under Title 32, to handle domestic emergencies or homeland-security missions. Also qualifying will be full-time service under the Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) program.

- **Less complex.** The variance of entitlements for attending private colleges will be ended through use of the \$17,500 benefit cap, to be adjusted annually based on the nationwide rise in education costs. The cap will replace different ceilings in every state,

based on tuition and fees at its most expensive degree-granting public college.

- **Book stipends.** Active-duty members and spouses will be eligible for up to \$1,000 a year.

- **Help for the disabled.** Veterans with service-connected disabilities who are eligible for GI Bill benefits but elect to participate in Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VRE) training will be eligible for a new living allowance of up to \$780 a month.

Tim Tetz, director of the Legion's National Legislative Division, said the reduction in stipend payments and the lowered tuition cap at private schools were an unfortunate price paid to ensure passage of a bill that "will help more veterans get the skills they need to get back in the work force quickly and help get our economy back on track."

Tom Philpott, a former Coast Guardsman, has written about veterans and military personnel issues for more than 30 years.



Official White House photo by Pete Souza

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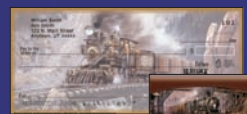
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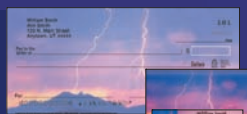
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Hearts and Minds

U.S. foreign aid can work in Afghanistan, as long as the people are allowed to accept it without fear of retribution.

BY BEN BARBER

When you roll across the dun-colored landscape of central Afghanistan, you pass a few shepherds and millions of acres of camel thorn, one of a few plants so hostile that sheep won't eat it. Finally, in the distance, a village comes into view. Within it is a school. And atop the school winks what seems to be a star – perhaps a billboard, or a big television screen. You've come to the latest U.S. foreign-aid project: solar panels that provide, for the first time ever, electric lights for hundreds of kids who walk several kilometers every day to attend classes. Other solar panels have been installed at rural health-care clinics in the region, and are now capable of running hot water, electric lights, incubators, and refrigerators for vaccines and medicine.

It is no secret that many Afghans – as well as Pakistanis, Indonesians and others – still live like their ancestors did in the Middle Ages.

But what does the United States hope to achieve with these solar panels? For that matter, what does the United States hope to achieve with any of the \$27 billion in foreign aid spent worldwide last year alone? President George W. Bush once said we give aid because it is a moral obligation: "To whom much is given, much is expected." Other presidents, from John F. Kennedy on, have echoed that sentiment. We help because we can (foreign aid represents about 1 percent of the federal budget), and because our help advances U.S. values like democracy and human rights.

Others say U.S. foreign aid is little more than a political tool to advance U.S. economic interests and security, that roads built with foreign-aid money pave the way for U.S. products and trade, or that our largesse creates allies in the fight against terrorism.

For both these polarized views of foreign aid – we do it because it's right or we do it because it's in our own best interest – there is a common link.

U.S. aid aims to win hearts and minds, to make people in developing countries like us and be more like us. Even if we give aid purely because we know it's the right thing to do – because we can't bear to see starving, dying people on the evening news – we also think that by sending millions of dollars, people of those foreign countries may be inclined to adopt the trappings of U.S. free markets and democracy.

But how can we be sure our aid is really able to win hearts and minds?

The United States increased foreign-aid spending from \$9 billion in 2000 to \$27 billion in 2008, and so we are shocked when foreign terrorists attack us verbally, or with car bombs or suicide vests. They even kill U.S. aid workers, who are now unable to leave their fortified bases to visit schools and clinics. So we hire Afghans and Pakistanis to design and complete U.S. aid projects. Having been told since childhood that money can't buy love, we still seem surprised when our hands get bitten while trying to feed those in need.

Nancy Hatch Dupree, who has lived for 50 years in Afghanistan and is the widow of famed

Afghanistan expert Louis Dupree, told me recently in Kabul that foreign aid can blunt Islamic extremism “if it is done right. It is not being done right now.

“Afghans don’t like to be ‘go-fers’ and told to carry out the plan,” she said. “We need to get the mid-level Afghans involved in drawing up plans. Also, there is too much money, and Afghans will take advantage of opportunities. It fuels corruption.”

Dupree and others in Kabul say U.S. aid is faltering because foreign development agencies hire educated Afghans at salaries far above what the Afghan government can pay. Then the aid groups set up programs without fully involving the Afghan officials who will ultimately inherit the schools and clinics built or improved with the U.S. money. Aid programs can also spark jealous rivalries among tribes and districts, creating more animosity than friendship.

That has not always been the case. In other places and other times, foreign aid has proven its worth in the pursuit of victory over hearts and minds.

After World War II, the United States launched the Marshall Plan – \$13 billion in bulldozers and other heavy equipment sent to rebuild the cities of friends and foes alike. It was far more than altruism. Allied leaders were painfully aware that economic chaos after World War I laid the foundation for World War II. U.S. aid effectively provided jobs, roads, development and hope in the aftermath of World War II.

What is the main difference between foreign aid in the Middle East today and that of the Marshall Plan?

Back then, the United States allocated a staggering 5 percent of Marshall Plan funds – more than \$500 million and vastly more than it spends today – to public affairs. The Marshall Plan hired European directors to produce films that showed young, hopeful people getting back to work rebuilding their industries and their countries. The past was over, and the future depended on working together in international trade. The United States provided the tools, clearly marked with the U.S. aid shield and clasped hands, but each country provided the skills, labor and markets for the new economy. So successful was the Marshall Plan that European nations formed a common market, and for the past 65 years have been at relative peace with each other and allies of U.S. international diplomacy and security efforts, from the Balkans to Iraq to Afghanistan to the Middle East.

Aid experts say, however, that Europe was special because it had a long tradition of



Illustration by Dan Page

development, education, industry, effective government and excellent communications. You could give the French, Germans and Dutch the machinery and funds because they had skilled people to organize and execute the reconstruction.

In countries like the Congo, Sudan, Egypt and Indonesia, each has a unique situation. Thailand, for instance, had a well-trained middle-management population and rapidly maximized U.S. aid to upgrade roads, medical care, family planning, education and other services. Furthermore, Thailand had no problem about the United States getting credit for the help, and it remains one of the closest U.S. allies in Asia.

In Egypt, however, some \$25 billion in aid spent since the 1979 Camp David Peace Treaty with Israel has failed to produce the desired result. Much of that aid was delivered anonymously. Local ministries of education, health and power take credit for it. And while the Japanese built a massive opera house in Cairo that every taxi driver can point out to a visitor, we built sewer systems that improve sanitation, reduce illnesses, and preserve the ancient mosques and churches of the old city core.

Most Egyptians are unaware of the role U.S. aid has played in improved infrastructure over the years. When told of it, they say their own government must have stolen the money, or that the United States only did it to buy Egyptian political support for peace with Israel. Now, this grouching may be typical of people who live in semi-authoritarian societies. Yet it flies in the face of the enormous progress Egypt has made in the 30 years since my first visit, when people were skinny and ragged, the streets were filthy and deteriorating, and buses tilted with the weight of people clinging to the doors. U.S. aid has helped Egyptians export fruits to European supermarkets and provided education and health care to millions. But by choosing to downplay the U.S. connection, we've lost a chance to win friends. Many even predict that a truly fair election would bring to power the extremely anti-American Muslim Brotherhood.

Andrew Natsios, head of the U.S. aid program from 2001 to 2005, said that foreign aid can win



In central Afghanistan, three boys stand in front of their school, where U.S.-funded solar panels power lights, computers, a printer, cell phones, a copy machine and science equipment. Ben Barber/USAID

hearts and minds “in some situations.” Speaking in an interview from his Georgetown University office, Natsios said aid can be targeted to end the isolation that keeps many poor people ignorant of world affairs. When people have no connection to the outside world, they are susceptible to demagogues such as Osama bin Laden, said Natsios, who presided over the doubling of U.S. aid and establishment of programs in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

When U.S. aid supports – as it did in Iraq and Afghanistan – local radio stations, opportunities for non-governmental organizations, civil society, newspapers and Internet access, it has the best chance of winning hearts and minds. If people in the developing world only know bin Laden, they're likely to support him.

The U.S. aid program in Afghanistan and many other countries hired Internews, a California-based media training and development organization, to set up 40 radio stations and supply them with newly trained journalists. Even the fact that men's and women's voices could be heard together on the same radio broadcast changed attitudes in Afghanistan, where women's voices have traditionally been suppressed. U.S. funds helped set up the first private TV station, Tolo TV, which is the most popular Afghan channel today. And I recently visited Pajhwok Afghan News, a wire service similar to The Associated Press, that provides breaking news in Dari, Pashtu and English to newspapers and broadcasters nationwide. It, too, was launched with U.S. funds.

Due in part to these efforts to break the isolation of Afghans, a vast majority tell pollsters they do not want the Taliban to return to power. Taliban fighters are able to burn schools, kill government officials and keep U.S. aid workers holed up inside military bases. But they have lost the battle for hearts and minds.

Other successful efforts to win friends overseas took place after two natural catastrophes. When I went to Aceh in 2005, a few weeks after the December 2004 tsunami killed 200,000 people there, the sight of U.S. warships offshore inspired hope, not fear, among survivors. The day it sailed



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Indonesian nationals unload supplies from a UH-1 Iroquois helicopter in Lamno, Sumatra, Indonesia, following the deadly tsunami of 2004. When the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln departed at the end of the mission, the local newspaper published a photograph of it under the headline "Thank you."

U.S. Navy/Photographer's Mate Airman Jordan R. Beesley



away at the end of its mission, the local newspaper ran a full-page photo of the carrier *Abraham Lincoln* under the headline "Thank you." U.S. Navy helicopters had brought food, water and medicine to isolated survivors and airlifted many for medical care. Polls show that before the tsunami aid, 26 percent of Indonesians were pro-American, and 56 percent supported bin Laden. Three months after the relief mission, 28 percent supported bin Laden and 63 percent supported the United States.

The following year, a devastating earthquake in northern Pakistan killed 75,000 and left 2 million homeless. U.S. Chinook helicopters were sent in to haul tons of flour over mountains and destroyed roads. A recent study showed that Pakistanis closest to the fault line, who received the most help and contact with aid workers, were most likely to have their attitudes changed by the events.

"We are in a cold war," Natsios said. "If we don't promote aid, someone else will."

Natsios also debunks a myth that has been used in Congress to build support for U.S. foreign aid funding: poverty alone does not produce terrorism. By extending aid to lift people out of hunger and poverty, we do good, but we do not necessarily affect terrorism. The 9/11 hijackers were all from educated middle-class families. Bin Laden himself comes from an extremely wealthy family.

Counterterrorism expert David Kilcullen, an Australian military officer who served as an adviser to Gen. David Petraeus, notes another obstacle. Extremists go so far as to kill any Afghan who accepts coats, shoes, food and other U.S. assistance, and aid workers are forced to travel with military escorts, taking blame for any civilian



Pakistani men throw a bag of flour onto a pile behind a U.S. Army Chinook helicopter delivering humanitarian assistance and help following the evacuation of flood victims in Pakistan's Swat Valley in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province last August. DoD/Army Staff Sgt. Horace Murray

deaths or damage in the fighting. Aid workers are unable to get out and make friends or fully assess local needs. And when the people are intimidated by guerrillas who operate out of neighboring Pakistan, winning hearts and minds is irrelevant. Survival instincts take over, and that requires distancing oneself from the U.S. aid program.

The United States has learned a lot about operating in the increasingly remote corners of the world. Yemen, Somalia, the Pakistani tribal areas and similar ungoverned places are hard to investigate, police and neutralize. Even providing U.S. aid is problematic. President Bush envisioned industrial parks along the Afghan-Pakistani border so both countries could produce duty-free exports to U.S. markets. But without electricity, roads, water, skills and, above all, security, it has not happened. In many countries, U.S. aid is sent without the label "from the American people" so it won't be destroyed or cause harm to those who use it.

It's a complex and difficult task. Winning hearts and minds depends as much on culture, media, language and outside forces as on the desire to provide help to people in great need. And if much of the world is already on board with the need to cooperate and work together on health, education and the environment, there are always spoilers who persist, or rise up anew in places such as Venezuela and Iran, trying with all their might to turn against us our efforts to help. 🌿

Ben Barber has written about the developing world since 1980 for USA Today, Foreign Affairs, Newsday and The Washington Times. From 2003 to 2010, he was senior writer at USAID.

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FULL CIRCLE

*Dachau survivor
Werner Kleeman
has a war story
like none other.*

BY JEFF STOFFER

Werner Kleeman lives alone in a little white house at the end of a short street in Queens, N.Y., where ghosts of the Holocaust float through his 91-year-old mind. His hearing is nearly gone. He recently suffered a stroke. But his memory is sharp, and he recollects in vivid, passionate detail the events of a seven-year span that can never be forgotten.

Werner was a young man with a new driver's license on Nov. 9, 1938. On that day, he had driven his older brother from their family's home in a small German farm village to the U.S. Consulate in Stuttgart. They were there to obtain for his brother a visa and passport that would ultimately get him out of Germany and on his way to the United States or Israel. When the two young men came out of the consulate at about 5 p.m., they saw what they feared was coming. Jewish-owned businesses, inns and homes were under siege by mobs of newly uniformed Nazis. The "night of broken glass" had begun.

"We had a sense, a feeling, that it was coming, but you didn't expect it to come so sudden and so severe," Kleeman says. "When Nov. 9 came, the Kristallnacht, that's when all hell broke loose. They destroyed everything. Every window. Every

Werner Kleeman, now 91, in his Queens, N.Y., home. Amy C. Elliott

cup. Everything that was breakable was smashed to the floor. There was not a piece left. No furniture. Not a cup and saucer. Nothing. It was all completely destroyed in one night. And all the men were taken away."

There could be no delay for his brother, who was bidden an urgent farewell and boarded a train bound for Switzerland. Werner, just 19 at the time, then began a tense four-hour drive back to the village of his childhood, where his father had been a successful grain dealer for more than 25 years. As he drove, he passed village after town, each under state-sanctioned attack against Jewish citizens.

Within a few miles of home, Werner pulled over and used a public telephone to call his father. "He told me to stay away. The Nazis were coming. So I went on to the home of a farmer I knew and asked him to spend the night there. He let me stay, but at 5 in the morning, he asked me to leave because he had servants, and they may have told other people he was hiding somebody. In the morning, I had to go home. I couldn't go anywhere else, because of my car."

"We had a sense, a feeling, that it was coming, but you didn't expect it to come so sudden and so severe. When Nov. 9 came, the Kristallnacht, that's when all hell broke loose. They destroyed everything."

By the time Werner reached the village, he recalls, "They were waiting for me."

His father had already been arrested and taken to a jail in the nearby town of Ochsenfurt. An estimated 30,000 Jews were similarly captured and jailed across the country during the mayhem of Nov. 9-10.

"In the middle of the destruction, I was thinking about how I had grown up with these people, gone to school with them, worked with them," Werner recalled in a 2006 memoir. "We were all on a first-name basis with each other. Some of them were friends, some business acquaintances ... we just could not believe that this was happening." The family later learned that two farmers with whom the Kleemans had previously done business had set a big bonfire outside the local synagogue, and were burning its contents one item at a time. The fire marshal finally called a halt to the destruction, in order to keep the entire village from going up in flames.

Werner was taken to Ochsenfurt and placed in the same jail cell as his father.

"All the Jews from all the surrounding villages were in that jail," he explains. "And you couldn't talk to one another." He remembers the spiritual anguish his father felt as they awaited their fate. "My father was from an Orthodox family and never ate anything that wasn't kosher. The first thing my father said was, 'You'd better eat what they give you. You will need your strength.'"

One week later, the elder Kleeman was released and sent home because he was a veteran of the German army during World War I.

Werner was shipped to Dachau.

The first concentration camp opened by the German government, Dachau began holding political prisoners as early as 1933. Kleeman says they had heard about Dachau in his home village, as had most Jews during the period known as "Aryanization" – when the Nazi Party was rising to power, and any Jew or perceived opponent of

the party could be snatched from a normal existence and imprisoned without cause or warning. The camp was divided into two separate areas: one for work, the other for cremation of the dead. Accounts vary regarding how many perished in captivity at Dachau and its surrounding mini-camps. The toll is generally estimated at approximately 35,000 over a 12-year span, a tiny fraction of the millions who perished at the much larger Auschwitz concentration camp, and by other Nazi extermination programs throughout Eastern Europe during the Holocaust.

"You were loaded onto a bus, but you didn't know where you were going," Kleeman says of the trip from the Ochsenfurt jail. "You only knew it was Dachau after the bus went about 100 miles and you passed Nuremberg."

Upon arrival, Dachau prisoners were stripped of their civilian clothes and put into thin, striped fatigues. Their heads were shaved, and they were compelled to do whatever their captors desired. "You couldn't do anything," Werner remembers. "You had to do what they told you. If they told you to stand 16 hours in the cold weather, you stood 16 hours in the cold weather. If one prisoner was missing, you weren't allowed in the barracks until they found the missing prisoner. The meals, you would get a bowl of soup, which was mostly water, during the day. I was only there from Nov. 16 to Dec. 22. I lost over 10 pounds."

The leading causes of death at Dachau were usually attributed to malnutrition, disease caused by unsanitary conditions, and suicide. At the time Werner Kleeman was there, he witnessed other causes, as he huddled in the cold among thousands of other captives. "They were getting killed on the electrified fence every day ... we saw others starving, sick and dying. About 10 to 12 people died every day, some from beating, some from having been torn to shreds by vicious dogs, and some from starvation ... We were all part of one, large suffering body."



*"Very few families had the luck that I had,
to save my immediate family from the ovens and gas chambers."*

*Above the gates of the Dachau concentration camp are the infamous words
"Arbeit Macht Frei." In English: "Work will make you free." Getty Images*

Long prior to Kristallnacht, knowing that tension was rising toward a violent apex, Kleeman had communicated with a second cousin in the United States to seek sponsorship, a requirement for anyone trying to leave the country at the time. The cousin responded by vouching in writing that should Werner be allowed to leave Germany, he would not become a public burden. The British Consulate confirmed in a letter dated Dec. 9, 1938, that Werner had indeed been granted a visa. The young Dachau prisoner was then forced to pay the German government 2,000 marks to obtain a "certificate of good behavior" in order to complete the process. On Dec. 22, he was finally released and went back to his village, where his family's home was about to be appropriated by the Nazis. His father, mother, sister and brother were alive for now, but their futures depended solely on Werner's ability to get them out.

On Jan. 10, 1939, the young man left Germany for London, determined to save their lives.

He stayed at kosher boardinghouses in North London, where by luck he met a diamond dealer named Norbert Lehman, who had been a childhood friend of Werner's father back in Germany. Lehman arranged for work permits for Werner's brother and sister, and affidavits necessary for the parents to take refuge in England. "Very few families had the luck that I had, to save my immediate family from the ovens and gas chambers."

Having learned English in high school, Werner was able to find a clerical job in London, and his siblings went to work as well, his brother as a carpenter and his sister as a domestic helper. Finally, in early 1940, four months after war was declared and Great Britain stood directly in the crosshairs of Hitler's despotic ambitions, Werner's visa to go to the United States came through. Once again, the young man went westward ahead of his family, hoping to deliver them to freedom as Nazi Germany was closing in. He raised enough in donations to buy the least expensive ticket he could find, and crossed the Atlantic. He had \$2.50

in his pocket when he arrived in New York. Upon seeing the city skyline as the ship neared, he remembers, "I felt that I was safe. I took my suitcase and rode the subway to Jackson Heights to look for a relative."

He soon found work as a stock boy for a department store, and later as a clothing salesman. Two months after his arrival, he greeted the rest of his family at the U.S. port. For the second time in two years, they were reunited in a faraway place, sure of only one thing: they had survived.

On Aug. 10, 1942, Kleeman was drafted into the U.S. Army. "And from there, everything happened very quickly," he later wrote. He went to boot camp in Macon, Ga., where he became a U.S. citizen in a ceremony with 600 other soldiers, and trained at various installations along the East Coast until mid-January 1944, when he sailed for England. As D-Day approached, he was transferred to 4th Division Headquarters as an interpreter, which meant that he would not go in with the first wave at Utah Beach, as he had been trained to do, in the Allied invasion of France. That transfer, he is sure, saved his life. As an interpreter, he faced considerable danger in the European campaign, but his new role gave him a fighting chance to at least live through the opening scene.

While training in England, Werner came to know many top U.S. military officers, and became friends with J.D. Salinger, later one of the 20th century's most prominent American authors.

Werner, a T5 specialist, was assigned to serve as a personal guide and interpreter for a gung-ho young major named Gatling. They followed the first wave into France on June 6, 1944. Crossing the turbulent channel that day "was an experience in itself," Werner remembers. "You saw yourself halfway down, feeding the fish." After coming ashore, Kleeman and the major moved inland amid a barrage of artillery fire, passing dozens of fallen troops, on their way to help establish a division headquarters in the combat theater.

Because he did not speak French, Kleeman spent much of his time during the Normandy campaign



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providing support for eight or nine soldiers at a time, drawing rations, cleaning clothes and keeping vehicles fueled as Allied forces secured the Cotentin Peninsula and began their eastward march toward Berlin.

It was during the bloody Normandy battles that Werner lost much of his hearing, in the company of someone he would never forget. “On July 25, 1944, it was the biggest bombardment in World War II to concentrate on one small area, maybe three or four miles by six miles, where the Germans were sitting in front of Normandy to hold off the Americans. For two weeks, it rained every day. They couldn’t turn the bombers loose. All of a sudden one morning, word came: ‘Today is the day.’ I was burying animals up on the front line to clear the fields, so the troops wouldn’t smell them. About 9:30, I got word: ‘Get out!’ I took my jeep and went back 400 or 500 yards. I parked it at a farmhouse, where I crept under a table. A guy comes up next to me, and it turns out it was Ernie Pyle. He was looking for a haven, like I was.”

The famous war correspondent later wrote about that moment taking cover with Kleeman. “The rattle was right down upon us. I remember hitting the ground flat ... We lay with our heads slightly up, like two snakes, staring at each other. I know it was in both our minds, and in our eyes, asking each other what to do. Neither of us knew. We said nothing.”

“I lost my hearing that day,” he recalls. “I didn’t realize how bad it was until two weeks later, when I went into a beach hospital for a half a day. They tested and said there was nothing they could do. Go back to duty.”

Kleeman moved with the division headquarters through France and Belgium. “It was tough going. You had no idea if the Germans would surrender or not. Your mind worked mostly from day to day.”

When the Allies reached Berlin and Hitler’s reign of terror was over, Kleeman felt vindicated, but he had more in mind. “That was an achievement, to bring the war home to Germany. But it did not change anything. They were stubborn. They didn’t want to give one inch.”

Kleeman’s postwar military responsibility was to help secure and re-establish cities and towns under temporary U.S. occupational governance across Germany. He was astonished by the defeated Germans’ continued flashes of resistance.

The major he guided throughout the campaign had become a colonel by that time, and offered Kleeman an opportunity to go on with him to Austria. “I said, ‘Colonel, I would love to, but I have a special mission.’ The next morning, I packed my bundle – a duffel bag with a change of clothes and a pair of shoes. I went where they sent out a jeep every day with mail and whatever has to go to each unit. I said to the guy, ‘Where are you going?’

“‘Ochsenfurt.’”

“‘Can I come with you?’ He said yes, so I got a ride. The Army didn’t allow it. They didn’t want you to go and raise hell. I went without anyone knowing. They could have sent the military police to arrest me. They could have done a lot of things. But they left me alone.”

When he reached the little farm village he had fled nearly seven years earlier, Kleeman found what he expected. “There were no Jews left. They had all been taken away and killed. The Germans had taken everything. There was nothing you could claim. I gave them two hours to get out of the houses they had taken or I would take them out in the woods. The Germans were die-hard, even though it was over. They didn’t want to lose the war, even though it was over. They also knew they were in trouble.”



“That was an achievement,
to bring the war home to Germany.
But it did not change anything. They were stubborn.
They didn’t want to give one inch.”

During his time at Army boot camp in Macon, Ga., Kleeman became a U.S. citizen. Courtesy Werner Kleeman



"I feel like I am the best example of a young American.
I was poor, and I had to work myself up."

After the war ended, Kleeman returned to New York, where he started a family and ran a successful business out of his Queens home. Courtesy Werner Kleeman

He had sent word ahead to the village that he was coming. "The news went around very fast that I was there, and the people did not like it," Werner wrote in his memoir, "From Dachau to D-Day," with assistance from writer Elizabeth Uhlig. "When I approached the door of the house, I was in tears, remembering all that we had been through. My parents had been forced to sell our beautiful house at a ridiculously low price. The village had bought it and used it as a school, but at the time of my arrival, it was occupied by 50 French POWs."

Werner recognized many of the townspeople, and those who had perpetrated Kristallnacht. He spent weeks there with his fellow soldiers, gathering information about missing families and intelligence about the Nazis who replaced them. "I had to be very careful. I couldn't just go up and shoot anybody." As he and his fellow soldiers established their presence in the town, he assembled a list of everyone who participated in the attacks of Nov. 9-10, 1938, including those who burned the contents of the synagogue. He immediately ordered their arrests. "I had them put in the same jail I had been in, where Jews had been held. I gave strong instructions that there were to be no visitors, no packages, no contact with the outside world. They would be treated as we had been. I made each one sign a confession about what he had done on Kristallnacht."

He ignored family members who pleaded for their release. "I did not feel vengeful. I felt justified." He continued to remove former Nazis from homes that had been seized or forcibly purchased from Jewish families. He ordered others to repair a Jewish cemetery that had been devastated after Kristallnacht. He left the village not knowing or caring whatever became of the men he had jailed.

When he returned to New York, he explains, "We didn't talk much about the war. We did not have that type of conversation."

Werner started a business selling a line of children's clothing, working out of his home. The

business grew and evolved. He began selling curtains and shades for hospitals and, later, the U.S. Navy. He got married and started a family. They moved to the little white house in Queens, where his two daughters grew up and his self-employed business flourished. He remains in that house today.

In later years, Kleeman was able to return to Germany from time to time. He stayed in touch with his Army buddies, including Col. Gatling. He wrote back and forth with the reclusive Salinger, who won worldwide acclaim with his 1951 novel "The Catcher in the Rye." He became friends with the family of Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., who received the Medal of Honor after leading his men – Kleeman among them – into Normandy on D-Day. He has contributed to books and studies on the Jewish experience during World War II and has been interviewed on national television by former NBC News broadcaster Tom Brokaw, and was once profiled in *The New York Times*. In 2007, he returned to Dachau to deliver a speech to a new generation of Germans trying to make sense of that horrific span of time seven decades ago.

Today, as he looks back upon his life, Werner does not take lightly the opportunity the United States gave him to arrest those who would have sent him and his family to death by genocide. Equally important is the opportunity America gave him to restore his family's prosperity within his lifetime.

"I feel like I am the best example of a young American. I was poor, and I had to work myself up, but I was finally able to send two daughters to college – one to city college and the other to state college. They graduated and became schoolteachers. For my grandchildren, I was able to offer them education and pick whatever college they wanted. Do you understand what that means to me? That is what I see as success." 🌿

Jeff Stoffer is editor of The American Legion Magazine.

NOTICE OF NEW U.S. COINS



■ GOV'T KICKS OFF BRAND NEW STATE QUARTER PROGRAM: Congress has now given their approval to begin the release of the new State Quarter Dollars. There will be 56 coins in all, each featuring a newly designed coin from every state and territory. Don't be mistaken, these are not the old State Quarters that you get in your pocket change every day. These are all new coins from the U.S. Mint's® new America the Beautiful Quarters™ Program.



New state coins go to public free

State population figures used by the World Reserve determine how many residents from each state who beat the order deadline to claim the Collectors Coin Chest for just \$9 get the entire first year of never-circulated U.S. Gov't issued coins free

By R. K. Berry
UNIVERSAL MEDIA SYNDICATE

(UMS) - "They'll be practically clawing each other's eyes out to get the new State Quarters free."

So says Timothy J. Shissler, Chief of Coin Operations at the private World Reserve Monetary Exchange.

"Everyone who gets in on this will be among the first to get the U.S. Government's dazzling new coins," Shissler said.

The entire first year of these valuable coins are being given away free to everyone who beats the deadline to cover shipping and the \$9 claim for the new Collectors Coin Chest.

So, what's the catch?

Just be absolutely sure to call the toll free hotline before the 7-day deadline ends if you want to get the entire first year's coins free.

This is all happening because the World Reserve is issuing the new Collectors Coin Chest to the general public to protect and display the entire first year's set of the U.S. Mint's® first ever America the

Beautiful Quarters™.

"This new State Quarter Program could end up being even more popular than the original 50 State Quarters® Program," Shissler said.

Coin values always fluctuate, but believe it or not, the original State Quarters have already increased up to an amazing 400% in collector value just months after the program ended. "So who knows what these new coins could bring someday," Shissler said.

Never-circulated coins like these are among those most likely to increase in value. That makes getting the Collectors Coin Chest a real steal since everyone who does is getting the entire first year of the new U.S. Gov't issued coins free.

Rations of the new coins are uncertain because each one is only minted for a limited time and all of them will be released and delivered according to the U.S. Government's release schedule. So once they're gone, they're gone. These coins will never



■ HANDOUT BEGINS: The free money giveaway begins for state residents precisely at 8:00 am today. The World Reserve is giving residents the entire first year of the new U.S. Gov't issued coins free. But residents need to be absolutely sure to call the Toll Free Hotline at 1-866-941-7865 before the 7-day order deadline ends to get the coins free.

be minted again. "That's why readers need to call right now to get the entire first year of never-circulated coins for free," he said.

"These new State Quarters will be highly sought after and are extremely popular to hand out as gifts for friends and family. They are the perfect gift for any occasion," he said.

To make sure readers don't

get left out of this free giveaway they need to call the Toll Free Hotline number before the 7-day deadline ends.

"At the rate we anticipate giving these coins away we may be forced to give away more than \$1 million dollars of these valuable new coins to the general public. So, if lines are busy keep trying, all calls will be answered," Shissler said. ■

How to get your Free Coins

Find your state below and be among the first to call the number before the 7-day deadline ends. State residents who do are getting the entire first year of the new Gov't issued U.S. coins free just by covering shipping and only \$9 for the new Collectors Coin Chest. All of your free coins will be delivered in accordance with the U.S. Mint's* release schedule. However, if you miss the deadline you will be turned away from this free offer and forced to wait for future announcements in this or other U.S. publications, if any.

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Dave Pedersen, adjutant of Mexico City's Alan Seeger Post 2, receives a warm welcome from 5-year-old Brenda at La Esperanza, a shelter for abused and abandoned girls. James V. Carroll



Good Neighbors

Los buenos vecinos

Mexico City's disadvantaged children have a friend in the Legion.

BY MATT GRILLS

The moment the men in blue caps step onto the playground at Escuela Legión Americana, the children go wild. They come from every direction, wide-eyed and grinning, motioning for the veterans to sign their notebooks, scraps of paper they've pulled from the trash, even their arms. Never having been asked for autographs, members of Mexico City's Alan Seeger Post 2 happily oblige, surprised to be held in such high esteem.

"I think I've started something," says Dave Pedersen, Post 2's adjutant, laughing. As he signs one girl's notepad with an orange highlighter, another waits patiently, holding out a pencil and paper.

Here in the mountains south of the city, in the farming community of Magdalena Petlascalco, villagers young and old know they have a school because of The American Legion, and they're grateful for it. Visitors from the post get VIP treatment.

In 1957, a benefactor and friend of the Legion donated land for an elementary school, and Post 2's World War II veterans took out loans to build a six-room structure. After construction, they turned over Escuela Legión Americana – the School of The American Legion – to Mexico's Secretariat of Public Education to administer and staff with teachers. But the post remains a key patron of the school, thought to be the only one built by Legionnaires in a foreign country and bearing the Legion's name.

Every year, Pedersen and his buddies present awards to Escuela Legión Americana's finest students. They search high and low for donations of desks, paper, pencils, pens and other supplies. They've put on a jazz concert to buy the school five computers, and plan to buy 20 more. They're even trying to arrange English instruction there.

"Some of our members are getting up in age, and because of that, our support isn't as intense as it used to be," Pedersen says. "We used to visit every month. But we've never forgotten the school. We're proud of it."

Named for an American poet who spent his youth in Mexico before fighting with France in World War I, Alan Seeger Post 2 is the second American Legion post established in a foreign capital. In recent years, its active membership has dwindled, but these veterans – joined by the post’s Auxiliary unit and a few well-connected friends in the community – are known for their generosity to some of Mexico City’s most needy children: the poor, the blind, the abandoned and abused. Others call it charity. Pedersen, though, says Post 2 is simply being a good neighbor.

“More Than Their Parents Had.” Pedersen, a Vietnam War veteran, ended up in Mexico City the way a lot of Americans there do: business. After 22 years in the Air Force, he went to work for a company that sold products to paper manufacturers, often spending six months at a time south of the border. He eventually moved to Mexico, spent a couple of years doing consulting, then retired.

Until he read about Escuela Legión Americana in a local newspaper column, Pedersen didn’t know Post 2 even existed. Already a member of the Legion, he jotted down the address, showed up and got involved.

As the Department of Mexico’s service officer, Pedersen spends his days helping veterans and widows with their VA claims. But just as important to him is Post 2’s charity work, which began a half-century ago with the building of the school.

Escuela Legión Americana succeeded so well that within 20 years it was overcrowded; some students were traveling 15 miles by bus to attend.

The American community in Mexico mentioned the problem to the wife of then-President José López Portillo at a social event, and almost immediately a three-story annex went up behind the Legion’s original building. Today, the school’s enrollment is about 1,500.

“For many of these kids, this is the only education they’ll get, and it’s more than their parents had,” Pedersen says, watching as dozens of students crowd around Tom Murphy, an Air Force veteran, and Thor Stromsted, a World War II naval aviator, eager to find out more about them.

The youngsters have Murphy’s full attention. This is his first time visiting Escuela Legión Americana, and he’s overjoyed at what his post has done for Magdalena Petlascalco by giving its children a place to learn and grow – and, quite likely, a brighter future.

“They’re like a clean blackboard,” Murphy says. “They’re enthusiastic and they’re curious, and you see it on all their faces.”

As for Stromsted, a retired MIT engineer, he’s eager to support the school by offering a water-purification system through his company, Aqua Bio Technologies.

Without a doubt, the community appreciates the Legion, Stromsted says. He recalls that a few years ago, a group of people wanted to change Escuela Legión Americana’s name – to call it something that sounded more Mexican. Villagers refused.

“They’re proud of that name,” he says.

“Hardly a Dry Eye.” Besides supporting Escuela Legión Americana, Post 2 sends money every month to two girls homes: Casa Rosa de la Torre, a school for the blind, and La Esperanza, a full-time shelter for the abused and abandoned.

Funds come from the sale of post merchandise, 50-50 raffles, Auxiliary bingo nights, and proceeds from dinners and other special events. Plus, Pedersen isn’t shy about asking people to give.

“I don’t care where you are in the world, children are children,” Pedersen says. “They’re just kids, and kids here are not well taken care of, especially the ones who have been abused. They need help.”

Casa Rosa de la Torre opened in 1965 and has been managed by Mother Antonina, a nun, since 1995. The school houses 14 girls between ages 4 and 25, along with a 4-year-old boy. They come from poor families, boarding during the week and going home on weekends. Most receive elementary, junior-high and senior-high classes there, and a few have gone on to college.



Thor Stromsted, center, and Tom Murphy visit with students at Escuela Legión Americana, a school built and supported by Alan Seeger Post 2. James V. Carroll

Unfortunately, what the school gets from the Mexican government is a pittance, Pedersen says. For years, Post 2 has been sending Casa Rosa de la Torre a monthly stipend of \$200 to help cover its water, electricity and property-tax bills. And every so often, the men in blue caps stop by to ask what the school needs, and maybe bring the girls a treat. “We give them whatever we can get our hands on,” Pedersen says. “We got them a case of jam once, and they went crazy over it.”

Andrew Zgolinski, an aviation adviser for the U.S. Embassy’s Narcotics Affairs Section and Post 2’s commander, says he and his fellow Legionnaires are only doing what the American GI has always done – in other words, they’re still those guys handing out gum and candy to kids.

“Some of our members aren’t as well off as others, but everybody sticks a hand in their pocket,” Zgolinski says. “It’s part of being an American and being a veteran.”



The blind girls of Casa Rosa de la Torre give an impromptu concert for Post 2’s Legionnaires, who help support the school by sending food and money. James V. Carroll

Every December, Post 2’s Legion family hosts a holiday breakfast for the blind girls, who put on a small concert. They sing and play instruments, many of which were donated by the Legion, before opening Christmas gifts. And every year, Pedersen says, “there’s hardly a dry eye in the house.”

MEXICO CITY NATIONAL CEMETERY

Alan Seeger Post 2 has strong ties to the U.S. national cemetery in Mexico City, one of 24 military cemeteries maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission in 14 foreign countries.

Every Memorial Day and Veterans Day, Legionnaires conduct ceremonies here with the help of the U.S. Embassy, and the cemetery’s superintendent, Hector DeJesus, is a retired Army veteran and Post 2 member.

Established by Congress in 1851, the Mexico City National Cemetery is the resting place of 750 unknown U.S. soldiers killed in the Mexican-American War, as well as the remains of 813 veterans and family members from the Mexican-American War, the Civil War, the Indian campaigns and the Spanish-American War.

Congress appropriated \$10,000 for the purchase, excavation and construction of a burial ground in Mexico City for U.S. Army officers and soldiers killed in 1846 and 1847. The remains of 750 soldiers were recovered from shallow battlefield graves in and around the city, but the original wooden grave markers were no longer legible, and no other identification was available, DeJesus says. The soldiers were re-interred as unknowns in a group burial plot now marked by a monument.

In June 1851, Manuel Lopez sold the original two-acre cemetery site to the U.S. government for \$3,000. The United States chose the site because it was near a British cemetery where five U.S. officers were interred, and 2nd Lt. Ulysses Grant commanded troops there during the war.

The State Department oversaw the cemetery until 1873, when Congress declared it a U.S. national cemetery and the War Department assumed responsibility for its operation and maintenance. In 1947, President Truman signed an executive order transferring responsibility to the American Battle Monuments Commission.

In 1976, the United States sold half the cemetery’s grounds to Mexico for the building of the Circuito Interior expressway, and the Mexican government funded the cemetery’s reconstruction.

Open year-round except for Christmas and New Year’s Day, the Mexico City National Cemetery averages about 500 American and 1,500 local visitors every year.



This year, the star of the show is 13-year-old Julia, who has been at Casa Rosa de la Torre since she was 4. Before taking her place at the piano to perform “Love and Friendship,” a song she wrote, Julia delights the crowd by speaking to them in English, which she’s working hard to learn.

“We are grateful to The American Legion,” she says. “We wouldn’t have the life we have if we didn’t receive this help.”

For Jim and Haydeé Taylor, Post 2’s charity work goes hand in hand with their own. He’s a past post commander, she’s a past president of Alan Seeger Auxiliary Unit 2, and their Fundación Casa de Santa Hipólita promotes education by providing scholarships for underprivileged Mexican children. With the couple’s help, one of Casa Rosa de la Torre’s girls recently earned a psychology degree.

“It’s important for them to know somebody’s thinking of them, to feel that somebody loves them,” Haydeé says.

“Nothing But Smiles.”

The day after the breakfast, Pedersen and company head to La Esperanza. They call it “the orphanage,” but because of physical or mental disabilities, many of the shelter’s girls are considered unadoptable. They’ve been mistreated or abandoned altogether, and Pedersen calls their stories “horrific.”

Founded over 50 years ago, La Esperanza is run by Sister Maria Duran. Like the blind-girls school, it regularly receives food and money from Post 2. Though sanctioned and licensed by the Mexican government, the shelter receives little assistance, and its six-floor building desperately needs plumbing and electrical repairs.

“We have some handy Legionnaires, but some of these problems are beyond our scope,” Pedersen says. He’d like to hire and monitor outside help, and hopefully raise enough money to buy the facility a new washing machine. Right now, La Esperanza has just one washer for 41 girls.

As the Legionnaires walk into the shelter’s courtyard, some of the girls grab the hands of Murphy and Mark Walker, a Vietnam War helicopter pilot and former Department of Mexico commander, wanting to show them their rooms and how fast they can jump rope. Brenda, a 5-year-old in a pink sweatshirt, jumps into Pedersen’s arms.

She usually does. “One time I was here and she nearly knocked me down,” he says. “It was like she was running for a touchdown in the end zone.”

Murphy’s brought a couple of photo books he thinks the girls will enjoy – one on the world’s natural wonders, the other about animals. They’re a hit. One by one, the girls flip through their pages, pointing to the pictures and giggling.

“We see the joy in their eyes when we go out there and give them stuff,” Walker says. “We may not be able to provide them with the comfort or the love a parent could give, but we can make their lives a lot easier.”

Thankfully, Post 2 has friends in the community who want to help. Pedersen says two of them, Angel and Christine Trauwitz, do as much as or more than some members to make sure the Legion is able to keep supporting La Esperanza and Casa

Rosa de la Torre. They’ve visited both homes, and called on hotels and manufacturers for donations of food, sheets and other items.

“He has contacts everywhere,” Pedersen says of Trauwitz, whose father served in the Mexican military and was an aide to President Manuel Ávila Camacho in the 1940s. “It’s unbelievable. And he loves the Legion.”

A couple of years ago, Trauwitz attended a Thanksgiving dinner at Post 2, and “now they

can’t get us out the door,” he says. “The Legionnaires are wonderful people. What’s amazing to me is that these Americans give so much to charity. They do more than Mexicans.”

In a week, Post 2 members will be back at La Esperanza, this time with pizza, piñatas and Christmas gifts. And a friend of Trauwitz has volunteered to put on a traditional Mexican posada, or re-enactment of the Nativity.

Pedersen would like to do even more – for the orphanage, for the blind girls, for Escuela Legión Americana. His post is few in numbers, but he believes they’re making a difference.

“The best ambassadors you have here in Mexico City are Legionnaires, as far as good will,” he says. “The kids see those caps, and there’s nothing but smiles.” 🌿

Matt Grills is managing editor of The American Legion Magazine.

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An aerial photograph of a large aircraft carrier, likely an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, sailing on a deep blue ocean. The ship is viewed from a high angle, showing its full length and the flight deck. It is moving towards the left, leaving a white wake behind it. The sky is a pale blue with some light clouds.

Ann Langston sent a desperate note to her senator in early June asking for help expediting her husband's Agent Orange claim. Bruce Langston had suffered an aneurysm after long bouts with kidney failure, heart disease and diabetes. "We don't have time for formal letters," she wrote.

VA issued its standard response, acknowledging Langston's claim and assuring him of its "sincere desire to decide (his) case promptly." By the time that notice arrived in mid-July, the Vietnam veteran had been dead a month, and Ann was headed for another fight – over \$600 in funeral benefits.

"I wanted to shout at the VA," she says. "Twenty years of military service, and you didn't stand behind him."

Still adrift

Congressional inaction sinks hope that Vietnam Navy veterans will regain Agent Orange benefits.

BY KEN OLSEN

This sense of heartbreak and disappointment defines the Blue Water veterans community, which lost hundreds of men to Agent Orange-inflicted diseases in 2010 and watched Congress go home without restoring the VA medical benefits the Bush administration eliminated in 2002.

"We've lost so many this past year," says Denise Ross, whose husband, Robert, is fighting to stay alive while his Agent Orange claim plods through the appeals system. "And the ones remaining – their lives are taken over by the illnesses. They are losing their homes, they are dying. It's over."

Indeed, Ann Langston's husband, who served on USS *Takelma* from June to December 1968, begged her to give up. "Before he died, he told me, 'Honey, don't do any more. You know the government isn't going to do anything.'"

Final Push. One of the most devastating losses was that of Thomas J. Laliberte, president of the Veterans Association of Sailors of the Vietnam War (VASVW). Laliberte served on USS *Constellation* in the Gulf of Tonkin. He was healthy until he was hospitalized with multiple myeloma and kidney failure in 2006, he told *The American Legion Magazine* last spring. VA recognizes multiple myeloma as an Agent Orange-related disease. Yet his claim was denied, because he was a Blue Water veteran – a sailor who cannot prove that he stepped foot in Vietnam or otherwise had direct exposure to the toxic herbicide. Laliberte lost his job and his marriage after becoming ill, and by the time he died in August, he was living in a friend's guest bedroom and getting by on state assistance. His dream was to become self-sufficient again.

"Tom's life is a classic representation of what all of the Blue Water veterans are facing," Ross says. "His death took the wind out of all of our sails. It ended all of our optimism."

Laliberte, Ross and the other Blue Water veterans bet their waning optimism and energy on getting the 111th Congress to take action. The American Legion, VASVW and other veterans groups pushed legislation to restore Agent Orange benefits to anyone who served in Vietnam, whether on land, in the air or at sea.

Former House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner, D-Calif., stressed the urgency of passing the bill in a letter to his colleagues. "Congress' original intent was to provide these veterans with benefits based on their exposure to Agent

Orange and other deadly herbicides, regardless of arbitrary geographic line-drawing," Filner wrote before losing his chairmanship when the majority shifted in the House after last fall's elections.

The Agent Orange Act of 1991 made it clear that all Vietnam War veterans were presumed to have been exposed to the toxic herbicide, and should receive VA benefits for illnesses linked to it. There was good reason for that approach. The U.S. military sprayed 20 million gallons of Agent Orange in Vietnam and Laos to clear the dense jungle where the enemy took cover, as well as to destroy enemy crops and clear areas for U.S. firebases. The spray drifted into rivers, was carried out to sea, and mixed with the seawater that Navy ships distilled for drinking water, cooking, bathing and running the boilers. The distillation process increased the concentration of dioxin, according to a post-Vietnam study by the Royal Australian Navy. The Institute of Medicine, an arm of the National Academies of Science, later confirmed that finding.

*"Before he died, he told me,
'Honey, don't do any more.
You know the government isn't
going to do anything.'"*

Ann Langston, widow of Bruce Langston,
a Blue Water veteran

The consequences of the decade-long Agent Orange spraying program began appearing in the 1970s, when veterans reported troubling skin lesions and an increase in birth defects among their children. After considerable court fights and controversy, the chemical's manufacturers settled a class-action lawsuit with veterans. By 1990, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that a greater percentage of Vietnam War sailors developed non-Hodgkin's lymphoma than veterans who served with ground forces. A year later, Congress authorized Agent Orange benefits and directed the National Academy of Sciences to come up with a list of diseases connected to toxic exposure.

VA restricted the type of servicemembers who could qualify for Agent Orange coverage in the years after the 1991 legislation passed, says Jeff Davis, founder of VASVW. Then, in 2002, the Bush

administration quietly implemented rules that require veterans to prove they had stepped foot in Vietnam – the “boots-on-ground” requirement – to qualify for Agent Orange benefits. Even veterans with approved claims, who were being treated for diseases like trachea cancer, were stripped of their benefits, according to the National Veterans Legal Services Program, which has represented Agent Orange-afflicted veterans since the 1970s. That included Blue Water veterans, who served in Vietnam’s territorial waters, and Blue Sky veterans, who flew combat and reconnaissance missions.

An appeals court ultimately upheld the Bush administration’s decision, even though VA had skirted the formal rule-making process. The Agent Orange Equity Act before the 111th Congress would have restored benefits for anyone with a Vietnam Service Medal or a Vietnam Campaign Medal. Buoyed by the hope that they could get at least a little help for the medical bills they were bequeathing their families, hundreds of Blue Water veterans wrote and called congressional offices. Davis and other veterans met with dozens of congressional staff on Capitol Hill.

“I feel like people say we’re lying about the relationship between Agent Orange and the war ... I feel like they say we want to be freeloaders.”

Denise Ross, whose husband, Robert, served on USS *Vega*

Summer Stall. Unfortunately, the effort stalled as Congress started scrutinizing VA plans to recognize Parkinson’s disease, hairy cell leukemia and ischemic heart disease as illnesses linked to Agent Orange exposure. To the surprise of his fellow veterans, one of the leading skeptics was Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., who served with the Marines in Vietnam. Webb asked that the Institute of Medicine revisit its 2007-2008 study that recommended adding the three diseases and restoring benefits for Blue Water veterans. The results won’t be released until this summer.

Webb and other members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee also grilled VA Secretary Eric

Shinseki over the wisdom and cost of adding ischemic heart disease to the illness list at a hearing in September. Blue Water veterans are convinced that controversy helped kill their bill. Webb’s office defends the senator’s work as reasonable skepticism.

“Sen. Webb has spent his entire adult life, one way or another, involved in veterans law and assistance, and he takes a back seat to no one in concern for our veterans,” says Will Jenkins, Webb’s press secretary. “His concerns about Agent Orange benefits centered on maintaining the integrity of our disability-compensation system and improving the presumptive decision-making process, in order to follow the law and ensure we adequately compensate and care for all veterans whose illnesses are service-connected.”

By the time Shinseki was defending VA’s new Agent Orange presumptions, Blue Water veterans were hearing that efforts to restore their benefits were dead because the price tag was too high. In 2009, VA estimated it would cost \$27 billion to restore medical and disability assistance for sailors and airmen exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam, as well as for servicemembers stationed in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and a South Pacific island where leaking drums of the herbicide were stored, Davis says. He estimates that the true cost is closer to \$3 billion, considering that less than half of the 229,000 Blue Water veterans are still alive to apply for benefits.

Denise Ross, whose husband served on USS *Vega*, sees more than money in this controversy. “I feel like people say we’re lying about the relationship between Agent Orange exposure and the war, even though we give them evidence. I feel like they say we want to be freeloaders. They don’t realize that our fathers’, husbands’ and brothers’ lives are cut short – that they lose everything – because of the illnesses.”

Brown Water Reprieve. There was some positive news for Vietnam War Navy veterans in 2010. In late September, VA agreed to review the cases of 17,000 sailors who served in Vietnam’s rivers and inland waterways – so-called Brown Water veterans – at the urging of Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Daniel Akaka, D-Hawaii. The claims had been denied without VA obtaining relevant military records, including the deck logs of the veterans’ ships, Akaka’s office said.

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Even that presents a difficult burden for veterans. “VA says it gets Brown Water Navy information from the Navy,” says Charles Yunker, adjutant of The American Legion Department of Kansas. “But no one knows who you go to in the Navy to get information and what information you need. They could at least publish the rules or tell us how to get on the Brown Water Navy list.”

“I’m hopeful that people will realize their promise to leave no one behind leaves everyone behind.”

Jeff Davis, president of the Veterans Association of Sailors of the Vietnam War, on a comprehensive Agent Orange bill that failed in the last Congress

Yunker served as a radarman on USS *Lloyd Thomas* during Vietnam. The destroyer’s missions included inserting Australian special forces near a river a few days after Christmas 1970, and some of his shipmates are suffering illnesses directly linked to Agent Orange exposure. Because of the clandestine nature of that and other missions, however, it’s difficult to produce the evidence VA requires as Legion service officers help them file claims. “I get very frustrated the way veterans are treated by the government and many politicians,” Yunker says.

In early December, VA also announced that it had processed 28,000 claims for the three new Agent Orange presumptions in six weeks, using a new system. Veterans laud VA’s efforts to improve the claims-processing system but note that the recent effort does not address the plight of Blue Water veterans, who remain unable to get benefits unless Congress passes the legislation or the Obama administration reverses the Bush administration’s rule change.

“It’s a little uncomfortable that Secretary Shinseki used the Institute of Medicine statements to back his decision to add those illnesses, yet he will not consider that the IOM also recommended that the Blue Water Navy be covered by the rules of presumptive exposure,” Ross says. “The rest of us will still be stuck in the system of trying to prove exposure to Agent Orange.”

Retrenching. Despite all of the setbacks, Blue Water veterans and their survivors aren’t surrendering.

VASVW’s Davis, for one, believes that the Agent Orange Equity Act “will be back in some form or another” and that the next House Veterans Affairs Committee chairman will push the bill. “We’ve had very good bipartisan support in the House,” Davis says.

Success will require scaling back legislation, to restore benefits only to veterans who served in Vietnam’s territorial waters, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, and the Blue Sky Air Force, Davis says. Additional legislation can then be introduced to provide Agent Orange benefits for veterans exposed to Agent Orange outside the Vietnam theatre, including servicemembers who dealt with leaking drums of the toxic herbicide stored on Guam, Okinawa, Johnston Island in the South Pacific and other locations.

“I’m hopeful that people will realize their promise to leave no one behind leaves everyone behind,” Davis says of the more comprehensive bill that failed in the last Congress.

Laliberte’s daughter, Jennifer Carlstrom, and her husband joined VASVW to take up the fight in his stead. “These benefits would have been a huge help to my dad, and possibly could have afforded him the opportunity to get more help in living with his disease,” Carlstrom says. “I hope the bill can be passed so other families do not have to suffer as my dad did and our family has.”

Ann Langston will also continue to work on behalf of Blue Water veterans as she pursues her late husband’s Agent Orange claim and works to get VA to reimburse \$600 of his burial expenses. That seemingly small amount is important, considering she still owes \$6,000 on her husband’s funeral bill, is behind on her house payment, and is dealing with her own health concerns, including a second brain tumor in two years.

Meanwhile, Langston is being asked to prove that her husband’s diabetes, heart and kidney diseases were related to Agent Orange exposure to get help with his burial expenses. She is frustrated, but determined.

“I’m not going to give up,” Langston says. “I’ve got God. I’ve got my family. And if this means other veterans don’t have to go through what these Blue Water sailors are going through, then it’s worth it.” 🌿

Ken Olsen is a frequent contributor to The American Legion Magazine.

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'If the World Falls Apart'

For his actions in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley, Army Staff Sgt. Sal Giunta is the first living person since Vietnam to receive the Medal of Honor.

BY ALAN W. DOWD

After he was awarded the nation's highest military honor last November, Army Staff Sgt. Salvatore "Sal" Giunta told *Vanity Fair*, "I'm just another American dude ... nothing special."

Nothing could be further from the truth for this member of Battle Company, 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team. As President Barack Obama put it, Giunta is "as humble as he is heroic."

How humble? This "nothing special American dude" from Iowa is the first living person since the Vietnam War to be decorated with a Medal of Honor in the midst of an ongoing conflict.

Giunta gained this distinction for what he did on Oct. 25, 2007, while on his second tour of duty

in Afghanistan. Giunta's unit was ambushed by a "well-armed and well-coordinated insurgent force," according to his Medal of Honor citation. As he recalled, poetically and painfully, in the *Vanity Fair* interview, "There were more bullets in the air than stars in the sky – a wall of bullets." The firefight was so bad that, as President Obama noted, "Every member of 1st Platoon had shrapnel or a bullet hole in their gear. Five were wounded. And two gave their lives: Sal's friend, Sgt. Joshua C. Brennan, and the platoon medic, Spc. Hugo V. Mendoza."

Remembering that day, let alone talking about it, is hard on Giunta. "I try to forget a lot of this ... talking about it wrenches the gut."

In other words, it is a painful sacrifice – a sacrifice within a sacrifice – for men like Giunta to talk about what they did, what they saw, what they heard, what they survived.

Giunta survived Afghanistan's Korengal Valley, a nest for Taliban insurgents. During the ambush, as that wall of bullets slammed into Giunta's unit, the enemy cut down his squad leader. The citation says Giunta "exposed himself to withering enemy fire and raced towards his squad leader, helped him to cover, and administered medical aid." But Giunta himself was hit and returned fire. He saw other wounded soldiers and moved toward them, only to be forced to the ground by enemy fire. After reaching the group, he observed two insurgents carrying away a U.S. soldier. He engaged the enemy, killing one and wounding the other.

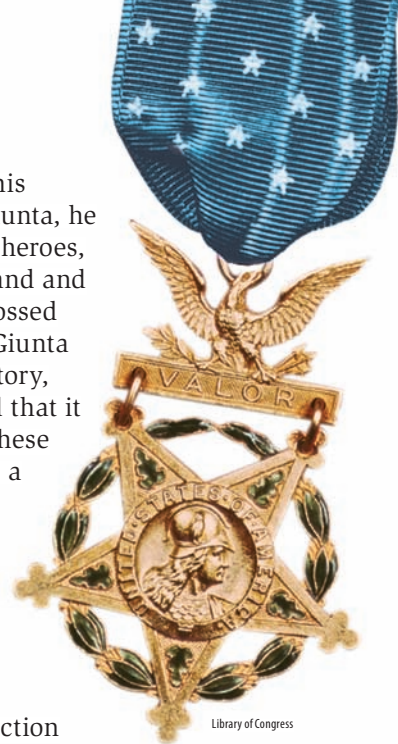
"I saw two of them trying to carry Brennan away, and I started shooting at them," Giunta recalled in a *New York Times* interview. "They dropped him, and when I looked at him, he was still conscious." But Brennan was badly wounded. As many as six rounds had ripped through his body.

The *Times* report gives us a glimpse of why Giunta risked everything for Brennan. Whenever the platoon went on patrol, "Brennan was always in the lead, without protest ... He'd do anything for his friends." And so would Giunta.

Brennan didn't survive his wounds. But because of Giunta, he died with his unit, among heroes, one of them holding his hand and praying with him as he crossed from this life to the next. Giunta never wanted to tell this story, but we should be thankful that it got out. We need to hear these stories, to understand that a decade without a terror attack on U.S. soil comes at a high price.

Giunta was a junior in high school on 9/11. As his mom recalled in an interview with the Army, young Sal's immediate reaction was to pick up his brother and sister from school and make sure the family was safe. "If the world falls apart," she told him that day, "I guess I can count on you."

A mother knows these things, as Sal proved a few years later in the Korengal Valley. 🌿



Read Giunta's full Medal of Honor citation online:

www.legion.org/magazine

Always on Point

Legionnaire Michael Brennan remembers his son, a hero.

Army Staff Sgt. Salvatore "Sal" Giunta was not the only hero in his unit. As he puts it, "I was one person being brave in a group of a whole bunch of people ... being just as brave."

Army Sgt. Joshua Brennan was one of those people. Giunta earned the Medal of Honor largely for his efforts to keep Brennan, badly injured during a battle in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley, from being taken captive by Taliban insurgents.

Josh's father, Michael Brennan, learned something about his son during Giunta's Medal of Honor ceremony in Washington on Nov. 16.

"Do you know why Josh always walked point?" Josh's first sergeant rhetorically asked Brennan's family.

"Because he was better than all of us. He was the best guy we had. He always walked point. He wanted to be out there leading his men."

continued on page 48



"I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom."

– Abraham Lincoln, 1864

continued from page 47

The elder Brennan, an Army veteran and member of Edwards-Foye Post 534 in McFarland, Wis., reflected on his son, Giunta and the war that brought them together in a conversation with *The American Legion Magazine* just days after attending an emotional White House ceremony conferring the Medal of Honor on Josh's friend.

Q: How did your military service influence your son?

A: Josh's mom and I were both in the Army, and he wanted to follow in our footsteps. He was a sophomore in high school and came to me and said, "Dad, I really want to serve my country after I graduate." I supported him in that decision. And I was very proud that a young man of his age – 16 at the time – would even be thinking about military service. Most boys that age are thinking about chasing girls, but he was thinking about serving his country. He wanted a challenge, and when he enlisted in 2003, he decided to go into airborne infantry. After basic, I remember telling him, "You'll definitely be challenged there, Josh."

Q: How often were you able to communicate with Josh during his two tours of duty in Afghanistan?

A: Not very much. The first tour, we would communicate by e-mail or phone every two or three weeks. But the last tour, when he was up in the Korengal Valley, it was maybe once every six weeks. They didn't have phones or access to e-mail. But right before he was killed, he called, and I wasn't at home. But he left a message, saying, "Hey, Dad, it's me, Josh. We've got phones up here now, and I'm going to be able to talk to you a lot more." I didn't realize at the time what a gift that message was. We saved that.

Q: Josh was wounded during that second tour. Had you heard about that?

A: Yes. It was about a month before he was killed. I was contacted by the Defense Department. All they could tell me was that he was in serious condition, and he wasn't out of the mountains. But then that night, Josh calls me, in that real, nonchalant way, and says, "Hey, Dad. Did you hear I got shot in the leg today?" I told him we were worried sick and asked how he was doing. He said, "It's all good, Dad. It didn't hit the bone, went right through the muscle ... I'll be back with the guys in a week." I told him to take it easy, because his unit needed him at 100 percent. We later found out that after the medic wrapped up that wound, Josh stayed in the fight

for 12 hours. When the battle was over, they called in a helicopter to get him out, and he asked the captain, "Who's the medevac for?" They told (him) it was for him. He said, "I don't need a medevac. I'm going to walk down this mountain." And he did. He took the point position and led all the guys down to their base camp. He always chose to be that point guy.

Q: Sal Giunta's Medal of Honor helps us remember the service and sacrifice of Josh, Sal and Spc. Hugo Mendoza, who died in the same battle. Could you share some of your thoughts on the ceremony?

A: Mixed emotions, of course. We were very happy for Sal. We can't say enough about him and what he did to get Josh back for us. It was an emotional day. I never expected that President Obama was going to ask us to stand up, along with the Mendozas. It felt like people clapped forever. It was very touching. And after the ceremony, the president came out and shook our hands. When he came to shake my hand, he said, "I'm so sorry for your loss." And I was getting choked up, and so he put his arm around me and gave me a big hug. That was tough. But then the first lady came in and gave me a hug. She was crying. But to see Sal receive that medal, it was a long time coming.

Q: Could you share a little bit about Sal and how you came to know him over the past few years?

A: The first time I spoke with Sal was about two days after Josh was killed. I received a phone call from Afghanistan, and it was from Sal and Staff Sgt. Erick Gallardo, Josh's squad leader. And these two guys were just sobbing. I could barely understand their names. All they could say was, "I'm sorry, sir. We wish we could have done more for Josh." And I found myself, as a dad, trying to comfort these two guys. I told them, "It's OK. I know you did everything you could. I don't want you to beat yourself up over this. Josh is in a better place. I want you guys to get through this." I needed to meet this man who did this for Josh. I needed to shake his hand. And I got that chance in Italy, at the headquarters of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, during a welcome-home ceremony. After that, Sal and I kept in touch by e-mail. This past summer, we went down to Iowa for Sal's wedding reception. We stay in touch with him and his parents and his in-laws. As I told Sal, I couldn't ask for a better man to be there with Josh at the end.

– Alan W. Dowd

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"To live free, be able to make choices in my life, and raise a family without fear of any harm coming to them is the greatest feeling a person can have. To be able to think, say, and worship without fear of reprisals is a great way of life.

"I have dedicated my life to raising my two daughters to be great Americans while helping my fellow Dega people both here and in Vietnam to obtain the same freedoms that I have.

"It is a right that all people should have."

Y-Siu Hlong

Executive Director, Montagnard Dega Association

The North-Carolina based Montagnard Dega Association provides services for indigenous Vietnam refugees who have escaped persecution and genocide to start new lives in the United States. Y-Siu was the first among an initial group of about 200 resettled Montagnards to obtain U.S. citizenship, aided by Vietnam War veterans of the U.S. Special Forces. He later received a college education, an opportunity unavailable to him in Vietnam.

Staunch U.S. allies in the jungles of Southeast Asia during the war, Montagnard people continued to resist the communist government years after the United States withdrew military personnel. Y-Siu estimates that the total population of Montagnards has dropped from 8 million to about 500,000 today through various Vietnamese government-sanctioned acts of cultural leveling and property appropriation.

"In Vietnam, the Montagnard people are always careful about what we do or say about the government in front of anyone else," Y-Siu explains. "They might suspect that we are trying to overthrow the government. They are always spying on us, especially the Montagnards who worked with Special Forces. They watch every step we make. In Vietnam, we do not know when the Vietnamese communist police will come to our villages to capture us and put us in jail or take our lives away from our families and friends."

The American Legion supports legislation that calls for restrictions on foreign aid to Vietnam until the government proves it has ceased human-rights violations against the Montagnard people.

Photo by James V. Carroll

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BROKEN SYSTEM

Alicia Wagner-Calzada

Two years after a precedent-setting victory in federal court, a Vietnam veteran's disability claim remains unresolved.

BY KEN OLSEN

A federal appeals court ruled in his favor two years ago, but Leroy Comer's decades-long fight for less than \$30,000 in VA disability benefits remains mired in the bureaucracy.

Comer, who started pursuing his case in 1988 with handwritten appeals penned in homeless shelters, received a partial settlement of \$13,772 in November 2010, along with a note saying that the case couldn't move forward without information Comer says he provided to VA years ago. In addition, VA withheld some of Comer's past-due compensation to pay an attorney who withdrew from the case nearly four years ago.

It's hardly a surprise to the Vietnam War veteran, who has endured years in limbo. He's frustrated that delays continue even after a federal court ruled in his favor. "I'm tired of them," Comer says. "I don't believe they want to make it right."

Dion Messer, one of two attorneys who represented Comer when his case finally reached the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, shares his frustration. "I'm completely disappointed that his case hasn't been resolved, despite the hard work and effort we put into this," Messer says. "The disability-compensation system is broken. It's really broken."

Comer first suffered debilitating flashbacks

after coming home from Vietnam in 1970, where he guarded an ammunition dump that was under frequent mortar attack. Unable to keep a job, he lived on the streets, used alcohol and drugs to numb his nightmares, and served time in prison for drug possession and robbery.

VA first diagnosed Comer with post-traumatic stress in 1988, but initially denied it was caused by his service in Vietnam. He spent more than 10 years battling to get the government to acknowledge that his illness was connected to his combat tour. He then spent most of another decade attempting to get VA to grant him a few hundred dollars in retroactive compensation for errantly denying the original PTS claim.

By the time he reached the U.S. Circuit Court in 2009, the last resort for veterans unless their cases are heard in the Supreme Court, Comer was seeking an additional five years of retroactive benefits because a VA doctor concluded in 2004 that PTS prevented him from holding a full-time job. That request failed because Comer didn't realize he wasn't filing the correct paperwork. VA didn't provide that detail, and convinced lower courts that it wasn't required to provide such assistance.

Comer's case caught the attention of Edward Reines and Dion Messer from the law firm of

Weil, Gotshal & Manges in February 2008 when the beleaguered veteran handwrote one last appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. Reines and Messer took on his case free of charge. In a January 2009 opinion, Appeals Court Judge Haldane Robert Mayer strongly rebuked VA.

“The VA disability-compensation system is not meant to be a trap for the unwary, or a stratagem to deny compensation to a veteran who has a valid claim but who may be unaware of the various forms of compensation available to him,” Mayer wrote. VA is legally required to tell veterans about every possible benefit, and then help them do what’s necessary to receive them – including informing a veteran when he isn’t filing the right paperwork. That sort of assistance is particularly needed in cases such as Comer’s, where “a veteran is afflicted with a significant psychological disability.”

At the end of the day, the government’s interest in veterans’ cases is not winning, “but rather that justice shall be done, that all veterans so entitled receive the benefits due them,” Mayer added. He sent the case back to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

At the time, Comer and his attorneys were optimistic about the precedent-setting decision. They believed his case would finally be resolved, even though they expected it would take some months for it to work its way back to VA’s regional office in Waco, Texas, for a final decision. In fact, the case still drags on.

Messer left Weil, Gotshal & Manges after it closed its Texas offices in fall 2009, and the case was assigned to Mark Davis, an attorney in the firm’s Washington office. Anish Desai, who is assisting Davis, says it’s been difficult to keep the case moving. “There’s no real clear avenue to speeding things up at VA,” Desai says. “In a case where there’s supposed to be expedited treatment, they should have specific dates by which decisions are made.”

From VA’s perspective, a substantial portion of Comer’s case was addressed by the \$13,000 settlement. Beyond that, VA says it’s doing what’s necessary to accurately evaluate his case. “The

responsibilities of the highly skilled staff members who process appeals at VA regional offices and the Board of Veterans Appeals include carefully evaluating the credibility, weight and probative value of the often extensive evidence that is submitted in support of appeals,” VA said in an e-mail response to questions about Comer’s lingering claim.

VA also said the \$13,772 covers what Comer is owed for his retroactive claim, except for \$3,443 in fees it withheld to pay a California attorney who represented Comer on his first appeal to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. The attorney withdrew from Comer’s case after that appeal failed in 2007. The attorney’s firm, the Veterans Law Group, says it will return any payment from VA related to Comer’s case, in

keeping with its long-standing policy to not accept fees in cases where it withdrew.

Weil continues to represent Comer pro bono, Desai says. In addition, the law firm was awarded \$70,000 in attorney fees by the

government for its work on the federal-circuit-court appeal. So it isn’t seeking a portion of Comer’s settlement for legal fees.

Meanwhile, VA also says it has done all it can until Comer provides “a complete history of employment, unemployment and incarceration” required to address the rest of his claim.

VA should have a clear picture of Comer’s work history, attorneys say. “The record contains document after document recording Mr. Comer’s inability to keep a job,” Messer says.

Desai agrees that Comer has provided his work history to VA before, but “it would take longer to figure out why they are asking for it than to give it to them.” That’s not as simple as it might seem, considering Comer lived on the streets for nearly 20 years after returning from Vietnam and hasn’t held a full-time job since 1975 because of his PTSD.

For Comer, however, it’s just another day of fighting the bureaucracy. “I think they prolong and prolong and prolong,” he says, “until you get tired and say, ‘To hell with it.’”

Ken Olsen is a frequent contributor to The American Legion Magazine.

“I think they prolong and prolong and prolong, until you get tired and say, ‘To hell with it.’”

Leroy Comer, on how VA has treated his case

[VERBATIM]

“An attack on one who serves is an attack on all who serve.”

House Speaker John Boehner,

following a Jan. 8 shooting spree in Tucson, Ariz., that left six people dead and U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords critically wounded

“Videos like the ones produced four to five years ago on USS Enterprise ... were not acceptable then and are still not acceptable in today’s Navy.”

Navy spokesman Cmdr. Chris Sims,

on an investigation into profanity- and slur-laden films starring the aircraft carrier’s then-executive officer, Capt. Owen Honors, and shown to the crew during

deployment in 2006 and 2007.

Enterprise was scheduled to deploy in January with Honors in command, but the Navy relieved him of his post.



“It’s no worse than anything you’d see on ‘Saturday Night Live’ or ‘Family Guy.’ I used to watch all of them. They were freaking hilarious.”

Misty Davis, who served on USS Enterprise from 2006 to 2010, defending Honors and his videos

“We’re going to go after this bill piece by piece ... to see if we can’t have the thing crumble.”

U.S. Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, on GOP plans to repeal the controversial health-care reform bill passed last year

Sources: USA Today, CNN, AP, The Los Angeles Times

[FOREIGN AFFAIRS]

The Stuxnet strike

The Stuxnet computer worm, a guided, time-released cybermissile launched sometime in 2008, has sabotaged the computers running Iran’s nuclear program, setting the country back several years in its goal to deploy a nuclear weapon.

Delivered via a USB flash drive, Stuxnet made centrifuges run faster than normal, thus corrupting the uranium produced, and through it all confounded the scientists in charge of Iran’s nuclear program. That’s because, as *The New York Times* reports, Stuxnet had “secretly recorded what normal operations at the nuclear plant looked like, then played those readings back to plant operators, like a prerecorded security tape in a bank heist, so that it would appear that everything was operating normally.”

Ralph Langner, an expert in industrial computer systems, has likened Stuxnet to “the arrival of an F-35 into a World War I battlefield.” Although observers increasingly believe Stuxnet was largely a U.S.-Israeli project, no government has claimed responsibility for the cyberstrike, and Stuxnet’s engineers designed it so that its origins cannot be traced.



[MEMORIAM]

Inventor of neutron bomb dies

Sam Cohen, inventor of the neutron bomb, died Nov. 28. An Army veteran and member of the Manhattan Project team in the 1940s, Cohen began working on the neutron bomb in the 1950s.

Some viewed the neutron bomb as preferable to nuclear and atomic bombs because it used fusion to create lethal amounts of neutrons, which would kill humans but produce a fraction of the radioactive fallout and leave property largely undamaged. Cohen saw it as a

humane alternative to other nuclear-age weapons because it could be used to target armies, but not civilians and the cities in which they lived. In fact, as *The Wall Street Journal* recalled, it was a 1951 visit to Seoul, flattened by war, that inspired him to develop the neutron bomb.

President Ronald Reagan deployed 700 neutron warheads during the Cold War, according to *The Los Angeles Times*, the last of which were dismantled under President George W. Bush.

[FOREIGN AFFAIRS]

Standing with China

When the Nobel Committee awarded Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize, 14 countries (in addition to China itself) failed to send ambassadors to the event, either out of solidarity with the communist government in Beijing or out of fear. For the record, those who stood with China, rather than standing up for freedom and human rights, were Russia, Kazakhstan, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Egypt, Sudan, Cuba and Morocco.



Berit Roald/AP/Getty

[MEMBERSHIP]

NEW POSTS

Post 540, Fayetteville, N.C.
Chartered Jan. 3
(15 members)

Los Angeles Chinese-American Post 628
Chartered Dec. 20
(15 members)

Post 466, Von Ormy, Texas
Chartered Dec. 20
(15 members)



[CONVENTION]

Nitty Gritty Dirt Band to play at convention

The country-folk-rock group Nitty Gritty Dirt Band will perform at the 93rd National Convention in Minneapolis, during the National Commander's Banquet on Aug. 30.

Founded in 1966, the band is hailed for its contributions to modern country and roots music. Its No. 1 hits include "Long Hard Road (The Sharecropper's Dream)", "Modern Day Romance" and "Fishin' in the Dark."

Tickets are \$45. Departments can send checks, payable to the National Treasurer of The American Legion, to The American Legion, Attn: Convention & Meetings, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1055.

Jim McGuire

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[MEMORIAM]

The fifth pillar

Legion leaders mourn the loss of PNC John Geiger.

On Jan. 10, one of The American Legion's guiding lights, Past National Commander John H. Geiger, passed away in Illinois at 85.

"People always talk about the four pillars of The American Legion," said Department of New York Adjutant Richard Pedro, whose friendship with Geiger spanned five decades. "But he was a pillar himself. He meant that much to The American Legion."

Pedro served with Geiger on the National Commander's Advisory Committee from 1978 to 1999.

"His love, outside of his family, was The American Legion," Pedro said. "He was very astute when it came to Legion history and Legion programs, but beyond that, he was just a brilliant guy, and his word was solid. It was his bond."

Jake Comer, who was national commander from 1987 to 1988, said the Legion will mourn Geiger's loss for quite some time.

"He was a great friend to me, but we have lost a major leader of our organization," Comer said. "It will take a long time before someone steps up to the plate like John did."

When Comer became active on the national level, Geiger was already an icon. "I would see him, and I was in awe of him," Comer said. "He already was up on a pedestal, as I saw it. He was The American Legion."

Geiger served as national commander from 1971 to 1972. During his tenure, he traveled to Europe and the Far East, receiving briefings from U.S. and South Vietnamese military leaders. In his testimony to Congress, he argued against dismantling or absorbing the Veterans Administration into a national health-care system, and against granting blanket amnesty to Vietnam War draft-dodgers.

Geiger also urged all Legionnaires to write three letters – one to their U.S. representative and one to each senator – calling for improvements to the GI Bill for Vietnam War veterans.

Even after his year as national commander, Geiger continued to have



Chase Photography

a strong presence in the National Executive Committee.

"As you became involved in the NEC, you saw John as a man who looked at every situation with an open mind," Past National Commander Ron Conley said. "If you were making a decision, was it for the good of The American Legion? He was able to steer you, not tell you what to do."

Longtime Utah National Executive Committeeman Bill Christoffersen met Geiger in 1959, when both men were department commanders. Their friendship continued for a half-century.

When Geiger worked for United Airlines and stayed in Salt Lake City as the airport added a terminal, the pair often visited Christoffersen's Legion post together. They also shared trips to Utah's Green River, and sat next to each other in the NEC's meeting room.

"I could write a book on the things that John and I worked on together," Christoffersen said. "I think we sowed a lot of good seeds for the Legion."

Longtime National Adjutant and Past National Commander Robert W. Spanogle remembers his first meeting with Geiger, who was a candidate for national commander at the time. Spanogle was one of 10 Vietnam War veterans Geiger invited to National Headquarters for a meeting.

"He asked questions, we responded," Spanogle said. "We asked questions, he listened. There was no generation gap between he, a World War II veteran, and we of the Vietnam generation, because he had been there: a World War II GI Bill student-veteran earning a degree in architecture, and an active member of the Legion."

"I shall miss his counsel, his mentorship, his integrity and his firm handshake ... his legacy of leadership will serve us well as we continue the work of The American Legion."

– Steve B. Brooks

[LEGISLATION]

Flag amendment introduced in House

Members of The American Legion family are encouraged to contact their representatives and urge them to sign on as co-sponsors of the recently introduced flag amendment.


On Jan. 7, U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson, R-Mo., reintroduced legislation for the 112th Congress proposing a constitutional amendment that would restore to Congress the power to prohibit physical desecration of the nation's flag. House Joint Resolution 13 simply reads, "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States."

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, is expected to introduce similar legislation in the Senate. In previous Congresses, the House overwhelmingly adopted this flag-protection amendment, but the necessary two-thirds majority in the Senate needed to send it to the states for ratification has never been achieved.

The American Legion is urging all concerned citizens, veterans and their families to rally around the flag once again by contacting their senators and representatives, encouraging them to become co-sponsors of this legislation.

In 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court's 5-4 ruling in *Texas v. Johnson* overturned 200 years of tradition and laws by declaring that the people no longer had a right to protect their flag. The court ruled that flag-burning is protected "speech" as defined by the First Amendment, invalidating laws in 48 states and the District of Columbia.

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[CAREERS]

How to get the most from a job fair

With the start of a new year and the impending surge in hiring, it's essential that you prepare yourself to be a standout star at both military and nonmilitary job fairs. Here are some "rules of the road" to optimize your success at these events.

- **Arrive early, so that you're one of the first to enter the event.**
- **Work the room to your advantage by starting at the back.** Most people stop at the first booth, working their way from front to back. Do the exact opposite and you'll be amazed at the results: no long lines, and employers anxiously waiting to talk to you.
- **If attending a corporate job fair, dress as a civilian with a suit and tie or, at a minimum, a sport coat and slacks.** Let prospective employers see that you're already "one of them." If attending a military job fair or an event with many defense contractors, military attire is appropriate. Match the audience you want to attract.
- **Write and design a résumé rich in achievements, keywords and qualifications that support your career objectives.** Résumé-writing is not simply a process of rehashing your past experience. You want to leverage that experience to support your current goals.
- **Print your résumé on colored paper, so that it will stand out from the hundreds on plain white paper.** Consider ivory, light gray, light blue or something else conservative.
- **Do not expect to get a job.** Job fairs are meet-and-greet events, so do your best to meet as many people as possible. Get contact information so that you can follow up with them immediately after the event.

Wendy Enelow is co-author of "Expert Résumés for Military-to-Civilian Transitions" and "Executive Résumé Toolkit." www.wendyenelow.com



[PERSONAL FINANCE]

Roth IRA offers protection from higher taxes

"It's tax time."

These words can make even a grown man cry. But if you're crying now, with historically low tax rates locked in for the next two years, what happens down the road, when taxes may be higher – much higher?

One of the best ways to help protect yourself and your hard-earned cash against higher taxes is investing in a Roth IRA (individual retirement account). Let's review the concept and IRS rules. First, you must have earned income, which includes compensation and tips – money you worked for. It doesn't include pensions, Social Security or investment income.

But you can't make too much. To make a full Roth contribution, your income must be less than \$167,000 if you file jointly, or \$105,000 for singles (rising to \$169K and \$107K for 2011). Since a Roth is "after-tax," you won't receive a tax deduction for your contribution, but you can invest up to \$5,000 (\$6K if you're 50 or older) into the investment(s) of your choice.

The Roth not only shelters any earnings and dividends from current income, but those can be withdrawn tax-free if you're 59½ and own the account five or more years. For many, they can be a great deal. Here's why:

- Say you're nearing retirement and are concerned about taxes rising. You

may have a military or government pension, and an employer-provided retirement plan that are subject to ordinary income tax. You'd also like to have some measure of control over taxes. A Roth IRA may be the ticket, as it can provide tax-free income.

- You can use it – or not. Unlike a traditional IRA, Thrift Savings Plan or 401(k), there is no IRS-required minimum

distribution at age 70½.

- Perhaps you'd like to give your heirs a tax-free gift. They can enjoy the same tax benefits as you.

The next steps are easy. You simply need to check your income, and open and fund the IRA before – or even on – tax day. This year, you have until April 18 to fund your 2010 Roth IRA, a few days' reprieve. "Tax-free" are two of our favorite words – aside from maybe "on sale."

June Walbert and J.J. Montanaro are certified financial planners for USAA. Submit questions for them online at www.legion.org/financialfootlocker.

Investing in securities products involves risk, including possible loss of principal. The preceding discussion is not tax, legal or estate-planning advice. Consult with your tax, legal or estate-planning professional regarding your specific situation.



[EDUCATION]

Online students eligible for housing allowance



Q: Will online students using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits be receiving BAH benefits anytime soon?

A: The new rules for the Post-9/11 GI Bill will go into effect Oct. 1, under which a housing allowance is payable to students (other than those on active duty) enrolled solely in distance learning. The housing allowance is equal to half the national-average basic allowance for housing for an E-5 with dependents. The full-time rate for an individual eligible at the 100-percent eligibility tier would be \$673.50 for 2011.

Valerie Vigil, a Marine Corps veteran and member of American Legion Post 27 in Arizona, is a past vice president of the National Association of Veterans' Programs Administrators. Send GI Bill questions to her by e-mail. askvalerie@legion.org

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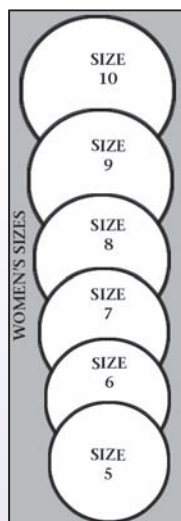
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Include the branch of service and complete name of the group, no abbreviations, with your request. The listing also should include the reunion dates and city, along with a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Listings are publicized free of charge.

Your notice will appear on our Web site within a week and will remain available online until the final day of your reunion. Upon submission, please allow three months for your reunion to be published in print. **Due to the large number of reunions, The American Legion Magazine**

will publish a group's listing only once a year. Notices should be sent at least six months prior to the reunion to ensure timely publication.

Other notices

"In Search Of" is a means of getting in touch with people from your unit to plan a reunion. **We do not publish listings that seek people for interviews, research purposes, military photos or help in filing a VA claim.** Listings must include the name of the unit from which you seek people, the time period and the location, as well as a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Send notices to **The American Legion Magazine**, Attn: "In Search Of," P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206, fax (317) 630-1280 or e-mail reunions@legion.org.

The magazine will not publish names of individuals, only the name of the unit. Listings are published free of charge.

Life Membership notices are published for Legionnaires who have been awarded life mem-

berships by their posts. **This does not include a member's own Paid-Up-For-Life membership.** Notices must be submitted on official forms, which may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to **The American Legion Magazine**, Attn: Life Memberships, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

"Comrades in Distress" listings must be approved by the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation division. If you are seeking to verify an injury received during service, contact your Legion department service officer for information on how to publish a notice.

To respond to a "Comrades in Distress" listing, send a letter to **The American Legion Magazine**, Attn: Comrades in Distress, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206. Include the listing's CID number in your response.

"Taps" notices are published only for Legionnaires who served as department commanders or national officers.

AIR FORCE / ARMY AIR FORCES

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ARMY

1st Bn 8th Cav 1st Air Cav Div (Vietnam), Columbia City, IN, 7/27-31, James Knafel, (260) 244-3864, jjknafel@myvine.com; **1st Bn 33rd Armd**, Fort Campbell, KY, 5/12-15, Luke Lloyd, (813) 642-9450, lloydrl6@quixnet.net; **3rd Post Reunion of Army Marines**, Fort Eustis, VA, 5/20-22, Becky Brashears, (757) 566-8110, tugchick@aol.com; **9th Inf Div 5th Bn 60th Inf Rgt Charlie Co**, St. Louis, 5/19-22, Tony Sparaco, (516) 293-6219, tony_sparaco@yahoo.com; **10th Inf Div 8th Cav Rgt**, Branson, MO, 9/9-11, Alan Sanderson, (319) 283-4043, a.w.sanderson@q.com; **11th & 328th Trans Co (Lt Hel) (H-34)**, Pigeon Forge, TN, 5/15-20, Allen Causseaux, (703) 971-3218, abc5822@cox.net; **19th & 34th Inf Rgts 24th Inf Div (Korea & Japan, 1950-1953)**, Pigeon Forge, TN, 4/25-27, Llanie Ellison, (205) 349-2237, bojnjoan@citcom.net; **25th Inf Div Assn**, Honolulu, 9/25-10/1, Sarah Krause, tropicltn@aol.com; **70th Eng Bn Cbt**, Reno, NV, 6/10-12, Roger Rock, (775) 623-1029, 70engrs@gmail.com; **88th Inf Div Assn/Trust USFA**, Washington, 9/1-3, Fred Lincoln, (508) 584-4169, f.lincoln@comcast.net; **91st MP Bn 58th, 289th, 512th, 560th & 563rd MP Cos, 54th Trans Co (Pusan, Korea, 1952-1954)**, Frankenthum, MI, 7/26-28, Bob Simon, (989) 792-3718, robsimoncondo@charter.net; **360th Civil Affairs Bde**, Fort Jackson, SC, 3/26, Tom Boland, (803) 788-7736, colusar1@hotmail.com; **413th 523rd Army Ord**, Canandaigua, NY, 9/9-11, Ralph Pickering, (419) 977-2350; **575th Supply Co (Fort Lee, VA & Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam)**, Joplin, MO, 9/24-25, Ron Demery, (417) 317-2670, rondemery@yahoo.com; **697th Eng Co Pipeline**, Branson, MO, 5/18-22, Tom Petty, (515) 981-3066, tom697th@gmail.com; **A Co 34th Sig Bn**, Branson, MO, 5/12-14, Lonnie Turner, (217) 690-2342,

lgeneturner1@yahoo.com; **ASA Southeast Asia**, Manitowoc, WI, 6/15-19, Jerry Frankenberger, (814) 643-6106, tvchieu@yahoo.com; **B Trp 2/17th Cav 101st Abn Div**, Fort Campbell, KY, 5/12-15, Larry Allen, (630) 546-8654, 206boulevard@comcast.net; **HHB 108th Arty Grp**, Bloomington, MN, 9/8-11, Ty Cobb, (630) 894-1941, tec425@sbcglobal.net; **Saumur Gen Depot APO 322**, Nashville, TN, 6/26-30, Richard Miller, (949) 770-2543, rkmgmiller@aol.com; **Sig Serv & ASA Okinawa (1945-1970)**, Cincinnati, 9/14-18, Paul Watson, (978) 465-7473, w562236@aol.com; **Trans Corps**, Fort Eustis, VA, 7/30-31, Ted Cimral, (757) 229-3062, tcimral@cox.net; **Vietnam Dusters, Quads, Searchlights, Vulcans & Hawks**, Boston, 7/6-10, Bruce Geiger, (914) 576-1050, ndqsa@cox.net

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40th Armd 23rd Inf Rgt, Indianapolis, 9/12-16, Don Bayt, (727) 287-6668, conniebait@msn.com; **Alaska Mil Vets**, Indianapolis, 9/12-16, Don Retchlag, (847) 608-4570, lindas5@yahoo.com; **Army Sec Agency Southeast Asia**, Manitowoc, WI, 6/16-18, John Salzman, (920) 629-1124, johns@oldspooksandspies.org; **Saigon Mission Assn DAO**, San Antonio, 4/29-30, John Guffey, (405) 799-7379, john.guffey@netzero.net; **Udorn RTAFB, Thailand (1959-1975)**, Mount Pleasant, MI, 7/24-26, Jerry Long, (817) 594-4623, long_jerry@sbcglobal.net

MARINES

3rd Bn 4th Mar, Branson, MO, 9/14-18, Chuck Bryant, (719) 850-1507, chuckb@rgsla.com; **9th Eng & 1st Shore Party Bn**, Charleston, SC, 6/12-16, Herb Shaw, (912) 424-9084, hshaw@bellsouth.net; **Bennington Mar Det**, San Antonio, 9/1-4, Gary Arney, (865) 458-9536, arneyathome@charter.net; **Echo 2/7 (Vietnam)**, Quantico, VA, 6/1-3, Addison Johnson, (434) 585-3685, askipjohnson@hotmail.com; **FLC FLSG A/B**, Reno, NV, 9/29-10/1, Frank Miller, (775) 751-8076, familier56@yahoo.com; **Mar Ammo Co**, Quantico, VA, 5/11-13, Tom Crotty, (513) 451-4694, tomandcar@fuse.net; **Plt 293 (San Diego, 1967)**, Houston, 4/8-9, Ed McDaniel, (321) 639-9916, padrebucky@yahoo.com

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AS A CROWDED AIRLINER prepared to take off, the silence was shattered by a 5-year-old boy who picked that moment to throw a temper tantrum. No matter what his frustrated, embarrassed mother did to try to calm him down, the boy continued to scream and kick the seats around him.

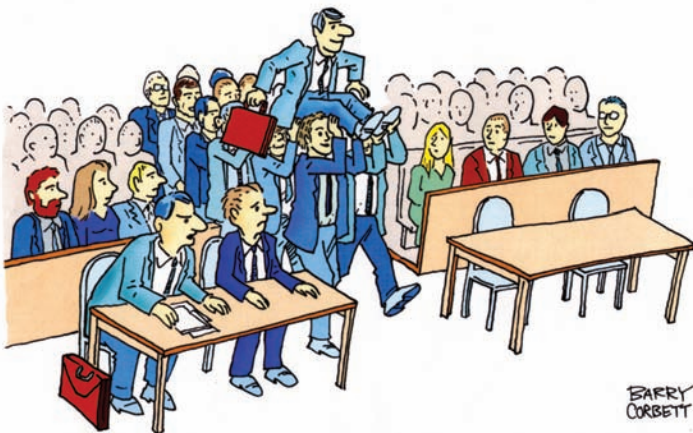
Suddenly, from the rear of the plane, an older man in the uniform of an Air Force general walked up the aisle. Stopping the flustered mother with an upraised hand, the white-haired, courtly, soft-spoken general leaned down and, motioning toward his chest, whispered something into the boy's ear.

He instantly calmed down, took his mother's hand, and quietly fastened his seat belt. All the other passengers burst into spontaneous applause.

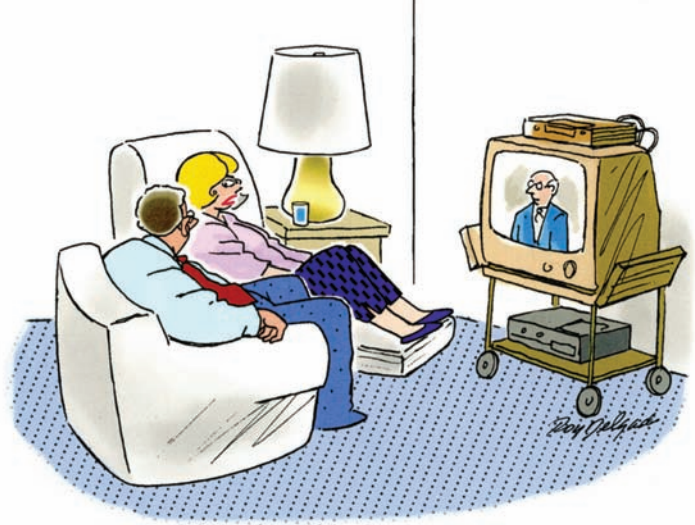
As the general made his way back to his seat, one of the cabin attendants touched his sleeve. "Excuse me, General," she asked, "but could I ask you what magic words you used on that little boy?"

The general smiled serenely and confided, "I showed him my pilot's wings, service stars and battle ribbons, and explained that they entitle me to throw one passenger out the plane door on any flight I choose."

READ IN A CHURCH BULLETIN: "Twenty-two members were present at the church meeting held at the home of Mrs. Marsha Crutchfield last evening. Mrs. Crutchfield and Mrs. Rankin sang a duet, 'The Lord Knows Why.'"



"He's showboating. Don't let it get to you."



"What makes you think that your bartender is more qualified than my hairdresser to solve our marital problems?"



"I know figures don't lie. Your job is to make them."

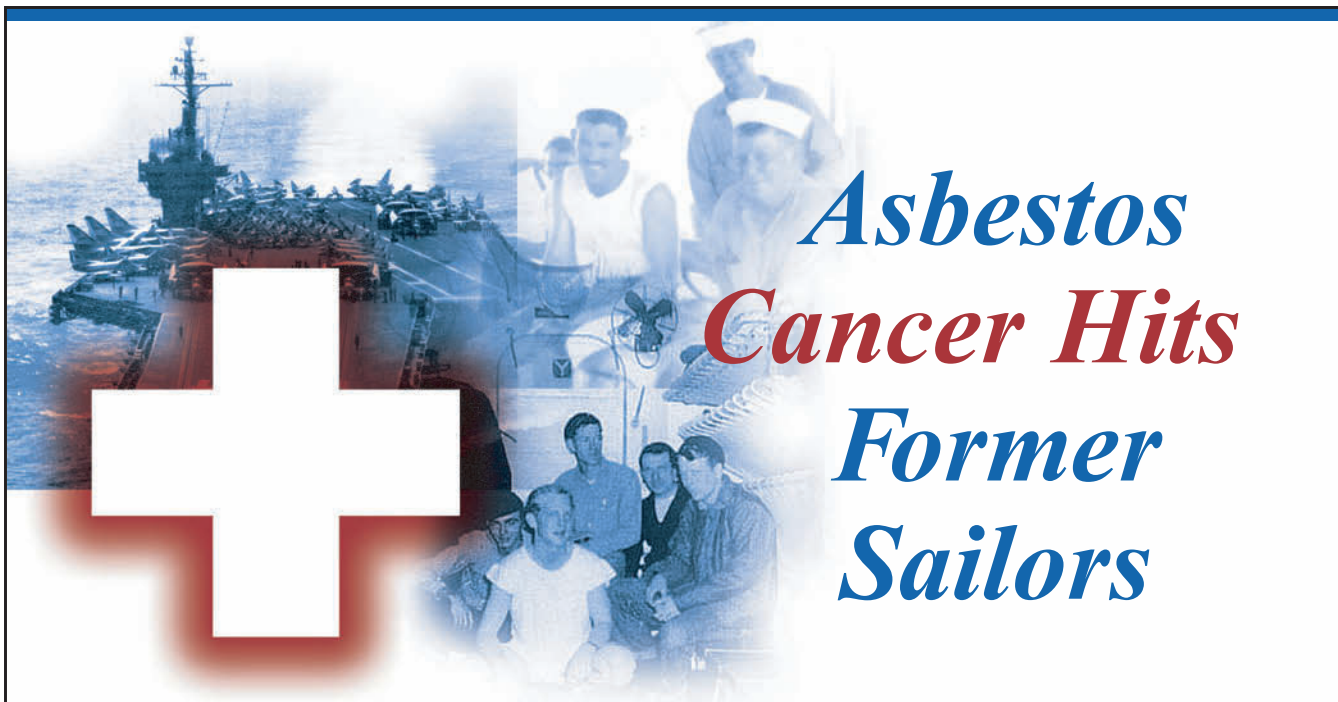
NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN union members and their employer were at an impasse, as the union denied that its workers were flagrantly abusing their contracts' sick-leave provisions.

One morning, at the bargaining table, the company's chief negotiator held aloft that day's newspaper. "Believe it or not, this man called in sick yesterday!" he announced.

There, on the sports page, was a photo of the supposedly ill employee, who had won a local golf tournament with an excellent score.

The silence in the room was broken by a union negotiator. "Wow!" he said. "Just think of the score he would have had if he hadn't been sick!"

"AL-QAIDA is planning Christmas attacks in the U.S. and Europe. The U.S. government sprang into action and told al-Qaida, 'Hey, you cannot call them Christmas attacks. You have to call them holiday attacks.'" – Jay Leno



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